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HISTORY
AMERICAN REBEL
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STANDING TALL
EGYPT'S GREAT PYRAMIDS
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JEWEL OF THE ANCIENT WORLD
HALTING THE HUNS
THE ALLIANCE THAT STOPPED ATTILA
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PREDATOR OR PAWN?
PLUS:
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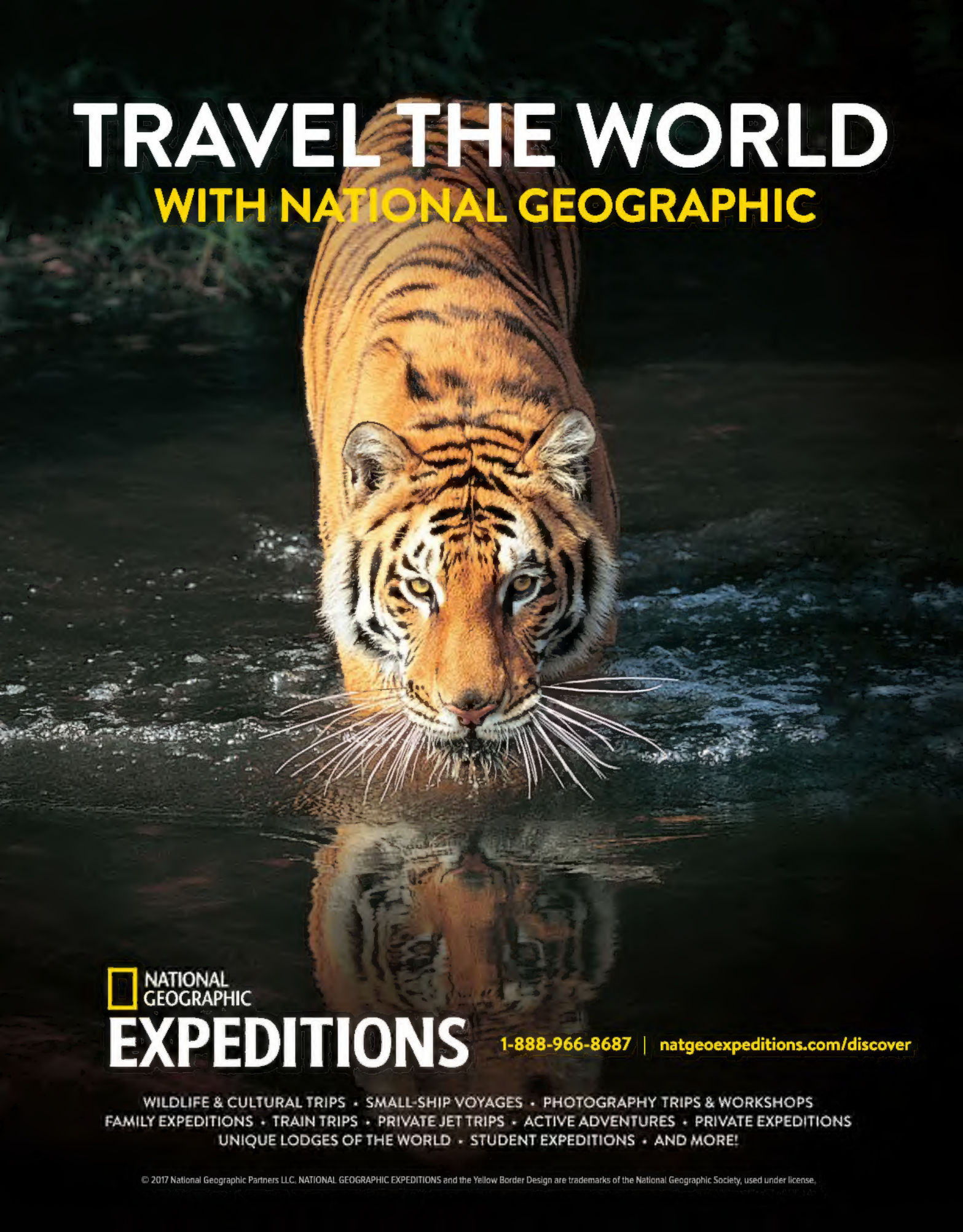
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**History is full** of stories that are not easy to tell or easy to hear. But they must be told in order to understand more fully the human experience. When U.S. president Barack Obama spoke at the opening of the African American History Museum in 2016, he addressed this very issue: "The best history helps us recognize the mistakes that we've made and the dark corners of the human spirit that we need to guard against. And, yes, a clear-eyed view of history can make us uncomfortable, and shake us out of familiar narratives. But it is precisely because of that discomfort that we learn and grow and harness our collective power to make this nation more perfect . . . It is in this embrace of truth, as best as we can know it, in the celebration of the entire American experience, where real patriotism lies."

The story of Nat Turner and his rebels is just one of these stories from the dark corners. The 2016 film *The Birth of a Nation* brought the rebellion to the big screen, shedding light, sparking conversation, and yielding exploration that led to new historical discoveries. As we further probe the thorny legacy of this event, we see how all Americans can learn and grow from a better understanding of Nat Turner, his rebels, and their place in the American story.

Amy Briggs

Amy Briggs, Executive Editor

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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

# HISTORY

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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

# HISTORY

VOL. 2 NO. 6

**A MODEL OF VIRTUE**
Noble and refined, the red-cloaked figure of Lucrezia Borgia (right) served as Il Pinturicchio's model for St. Catherine in his 1492 fresco series for the Borgia Apartments in the Vatican.

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**A CRUSHING BLOW** Nicknamed Kaakutja, meaning "older brother," this skeleton (near right) of an Aboriginal man rested for some 800 years near a southern Australian riverbank before being found in 2014. Scientists determined Kaakutja died from a blow to the head, the fatal fracture which can be seen across his eye socket (above). Near his burial place, paintings adorn the rocks (right) and depict different Aboriginal peoples wielding shields and boomerangs, creating a fuller picture of pre-colonial Australia and its peoples.

PHOTOS: MICHAEL C. WESTAWAY/GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY

MARY EVANS/AGE FOTOSTOCK

**AN ABORIGINE** WIELDING A BOOMERANG, DEPICTED IN A GERMAN SCIENCE BOOK, CIRCA 1890

ANCIENT MURDER WEAPON

# The Boomerang Effect: What Killed Kaakutja?

Tantalizing glimpses into life and death in pre-colonial Australia are written on the bones of a skeleton found in New South Wales.

When William Bates, an elder of the Baakantji people of New South Wales, found a skeleton by a river in 2014, he identified it as an Aboriginal male. The mouth was wide open. "To me, he was crying for help," Bates recalls, "so I said, I'll help you."

The bones bore obvious signs of violence. In most murder mysteries, establishing the time of death is one of the first things detectives do, and in the course of an initial study, researchers assumed he had been killed during the bloodshed between British colonizers and Australia's indigenous peoples in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

But these early assumptions would be challenged when the body, now named Kaakutja, meaning "older brother," was examined by

MICHAEL C. WESTAWAY/GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY

## THE COMEBACK STICK

**THROWN AS A WEAPON,** painted or carved as artwork, rattled together in religious ceremonies, and wielded on the hunt, the boomerang has become the global symbol of Australian Aboriginal culture. The word originates from a language spoken in what is today New South Wales, but the original meaning is itself obscure. The weapon's most famous attribute—of returning to the thrower after completing a loop of up to 50 feet—is, in fact, only a quality of the lighter variety. While a hunter typically maimed prey by throwing his boomerang from a distance, it was also used in close combat—the fate that perhaps befell Kaakutja, when his assailant's saber-sharp boomerang navigated around Kaakutja's shield and struck his skull.

**HUNTING BOOMERANGS** FROM DIFFERENT CLANS, CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

AUSCAPE/GETTY IMAGES

Dr. Michael Westaway, a paleoanthropologist at Griffith University in Queensland. "He was obviously someone that a lot of people cared for," Westaway comments, noting that in the burial, his head had been tenderly placed on a cushion of sand.

At first glance, Westaway reasoned that Kaakutja's lethal injury, a long wound on his skull, had come from a cutlass blade, most likely dealt by the British militia. It turns out that the time of death was earlier—much, much earlier. When the remains were submitted for lab tests, the picture radically changed. Analysis revealed he had been killed in the 13th century—hundreds of years before Europeans arrived in Australia and introduced metal objects. What, then, had killed Kaakutja in the prime of his life?

Westaway, who coauthored a report on Kaakutja for the journal *Antiquity*, was intrigued by the cause of the fatal injury. One theory centered on the *lil-lil*, a sharpened club. On balance, however, Westaway has singled out the most iconic Aboriginal symbol: the boomerang, a weapon with a long, surprisingly sharp edge. Perhaps it had been wielded by Kaakutja's adversary to whip around his shield and smash into his head.

Although study of intertribal violence in pre-contact Australia is still largely based on accounts rather than archaeological evidence, Kaakutja's death does have a precedent. Just under a decade ago, a skeleton was unearthed near Sydney. It belonged to a man who lived 4,000 years ago, believed to have been killed with stone-tipped spears.

"I don't know if it was a continent-wide phenomenon," says Westaway. "But we do see evidence in this part of [Australia] that ... supports intertribal conflict." One such proof is a series of rock paintings near where Kaakutja was found, depicting two tribes painted in different colors wielding boomerangs, shields, and clubs.

Throughout the investigation into what befell Kaakutja, William Bates's Baakantji community played a direct role in the excavation, contributing to the emerging picture of Aboriginal culture. "If it was not for their interest in their heritage, and their support of the National Parks Service," Westaway notes, "an important part of their past would have been lost."

# Giuseppe Verdi: The Sounds of Freedom

Born alongside Italy's press for nationhood, Verdi's operas provided Italians with the music that expressed the passion for their cause and became an important part of Italy's national identity.

## Masterpiece Upon Masterpiece

**1838–1840**

Despite professional successes, **Giuseppe Verdi** endures personal tragedies, losing his wife and two children over three years.

**1841**

To overcome his grief, Verdi throws himself into a new opera, ***Nabucco***, which will debut in 1842 and begin a comeback for the composer.

**1851–1853**

Years of brilliance: Verdi debuts ***Rigoletto***, ***Il Trovatore***, and ***La Traviata***. All three rank among his best loved and lasting works.

**1871**

Commissioned for the opening of the royal opera house, ***Aida*** debuts in Egypt and will become one of the world's most popular operas.

**1901**

Verdi dies in Milan. At his funeral, the great Italian conductor **Arturo Toscanini** leads an orchestra through Verdi's greatest pieces.

A writer named Gianrinaldo Carli told a story that became famous in Italy in the 1760s: A stranger walks into a cafe in Milan, and the patrons ask if he is a foreigner. No, he replies. Then you must be Milanese, they say, and once again he replies in the negative. Scratching their heads, they tell him that if he is not Milanese, he must be foreign, to which he replies, "I am Italian . . . and an Italian in Italy can never be foreign."

In the 18th century, the Italian peninsula was fractured into parts controlled by different nations. A century later, the notion of a united Italy had evolved into a battle for independence, pitting Italy's revolutionaries against the might of Austria and the Papal States. Although soldiers and statesmen played a key role in what unfolded, Giuseppe Verdi's music provided the soundtrack to the desire for independence. Through his many works, Verdi reflected, and even shaped, the struggle for Italian unification known as *Il Risorgimento*: the Resurgence.

Italy's fragmentation had deep roots in its past. The collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the Middle Ages broke Italy into city-states that took center stage during the European Renaissance. In the early modern period, central Italy was dominated by the papacy, while the rest of the Italian peninsula fell under the control of foreign powers, such as Spain and France.

After the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815, Austria strengthened its grip on northern Italy. At the same time a surge in anti-imperialism and nationalism began to grip Europe. Chafing under the yoke of Austrian control, many Italians yearned for a nation of their own and fought for it from the 1840s until achieving full independence in 1870.

### Talent and Tragedy

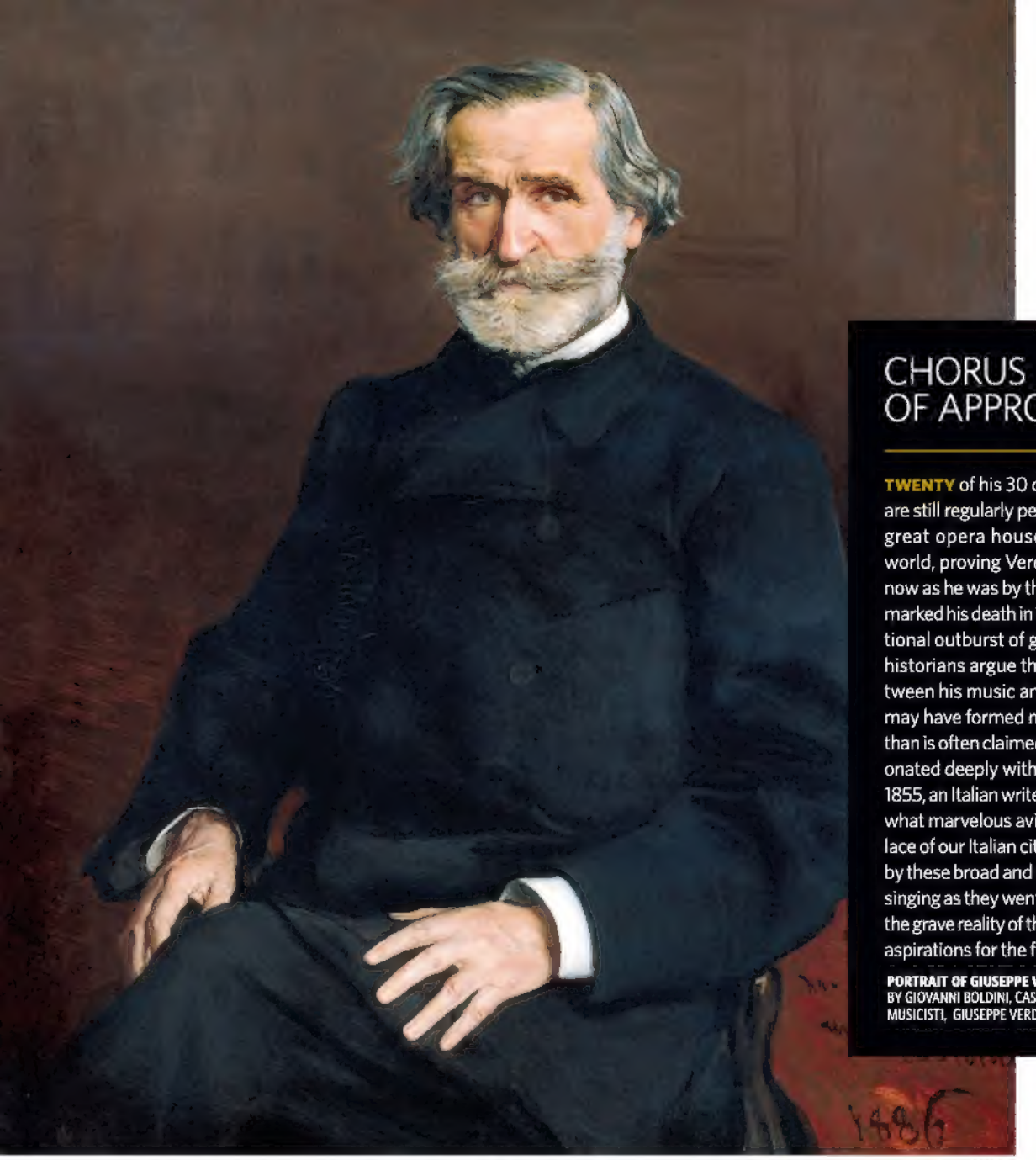
Verdi's life spanned two ages and two Italys. He was born in 1813 in the small duchy of Parma, at the time under Napoleonic rule, and died in 1901 in Milan, then the commercial capital of the newly independent Italian nation.

The son of an innkeeper, Verdi possessed an immense musical talent that could not be overlooked; by age 12 he served as the organist for his village's church. He continued his education in Busseto and then Milan, the intellectual and operatic center of Italy. At the age of 26, Verdi's first opera, *Oberto*, premiered at Milan's La Scala in November 1839.

SCALA, FLORENCE

**SCORE OF LA TRAVIATA** MUSEO TEATRALE ALLA SCALA, MILAN

> "*La Traviata* last night, fiasco. Is it my fault or the fault of the singers? Time will tell."—Verdi, 1853



DEA/ALBUM

## CHORUS OF APPROVAL

**TWENTY** of his 30 operatic works are still regularly performed in the great opera houses across the world, proving Verdi is as adored now as he was by the Italians who marked his death in 1901 with a national outburst of grief. Although historians argue that the link between his music and nationalism may have formed more gradually than is often claimed, his work resonated deeply with the people. In 1855, an Italian writer noted: "With what marvelous avidity the populace of our Italian cities was seized by these broad and clear melodies singing as they went ... confronting the grave reality of the present with aspirations for the future."

**PORTRAIT OF GIUSEPPE VERDI,** OIL PAINTING BY GIOVANNI BOLDINI, CASA DI RIPOSO PER MUSICISTI, GIUSEPPE VERDI FOUNDATION, MILAN

Despite early triumphs, Verdi's life was overshadowed with tragedy as well. His two children, Virginia and Icilio, died in 1838 and 1839, respectively, followed by his wife, Margherita, in 1840. His personal sorrow was compounded by a sense of professional failure when his second opera, *Un giorno di regno*, which premiered in Milan in 1840, was a spectacular commercial flop.

Verdi slipped into deep depression until a winter's day in 1841 when a colleague insisted he consider creating an opera based on a work by the poet Temistocle Solera. Accounts say that when Verdi carelessly tossed the manuscript on his desk, a fateful moment occurred. Years later, Verdi recalled "how the book opened in falling, and without knowing how, I gazed at the page that lay before me and read this line: *Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate* ["Go thought, on golden wings"] and I could not get it out of my head."

### Protest Songs

Solera's manuscript recounted the hardship the Jewish people suffered under the despotic rule of the Babylonian tyrant Nebuchadrezzar, *Nabucco* in Italian, who conquered Jerusalem and exiled the Hebrews to Babylon. Many of his Italian compatriots would understand the symbolism: the Jews were the Italians, and Nebuchadrezzar, the Austrian Empire's tyranny. As a fervent patriot and staunch supporter of the liberal ideals sweeping Europe, Verdi thrust his sorrow aside and poured his artistic potential into breaking the oppressor's yoke through music.

One year later, on March 9, 1842, *Nabucco* premiered at the La Scala theater in Milan. It was a stunning success. In its

**VICTOR EMMANUEL II** spurring on his troops in 1859, during a campaign that unified much of the north of Italy under his crown. Anonymous 19th-century painting, Museo Del Risorgimento, Genoa, Italy

A. DE GREGORIO/DEA/AGE FOTOSTOCK

first year it was performed an astonishing 64 times. The most famous piece, the "Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves," came in the third act and began with the lines Verdi saw in the book: *Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate*. The Hebrews are lamenting the loss of their homeland, a sentiment to which many Italians in the audience could relate. Over the following decades, the chorus became something of an unofficial anthem for the revolution.

Although Italian nationalism was led to victory by soldiers like Giuseppe Garibaldi, Verdi's music provided a huge emotional boost to *Il Risorgimento*. After *Nabucco*, Verdi was aware of the unusual responsibility he faced as an artist. Fame came at a price, however: Verdi was soon attracting the attention of the Austrian authorities in Italy, and his criticism of ecclesiastical power was likely to offend the powerful Catholic Church.

Despite enjoying the protection of the Countess Clara Maffei, a leading patron of the arts in Milan, trouble loomed for the composer. Shortly after his next opera, *I Lombardi*, premiered in 1843, Verdi had his first clash with censorship. The archbishop of Milan reported rumors that the work attacked Catholic rites, and threatened to write to Austrian Emperor Ferdinand I to make a formal complaint. The next day, the imperial police told the company that *I Lombardi* could not be performed unless passages were changed. The composer refused to edit a single

## VIVA V.E.R.D.I.

**DURING THE STRUGGLE** against Austrian rule, Italian patriots painted "Viva Verdi" on walls. The graffiti was both an expression of admiration for the musician, whose surname also conveniently formed the acronym: Vittorio Emanuele Re d'Italia—Victor Emmanuel, King of Italy.

**ENGRAVING** DEPICTING AN ITALIAN CITY AROUND 1850

KARGER-DECKER/AGE FOTOSTOCK

## KEEPING THE SCORE

**LIKE ANY GOOD ARTIST,** Verdi knew the importance of suspense and surprise, so much so that he even kept his performers in the dark. During the rehearsals for *Rigoletto*, the tenor realized that his part was missing from the score; he kept reminding the composer, who always replied, airily: "Oh, I will give it to you in time." In fact, the tenor was only given the score the night before the premiere and was told to practice in secret. Why? Because the piece would be his most famous aria "La donna è mobile" ("The Woman is Fickle") which Verdi had sensed—rightly—would become a smash hit.

**COSTUME** FOR THE ROLE OF THE DUKE OF MANTUA, IN THE OPÉRA DE PARIS PRODUCTION OF VERDI'S 1851 OPERA, *RIGOLETTO*

DEA/ALBUM

**THE TEATRO GIUSEPPE VERDI** in Busseto, the composer's hometown, opened in 1868 with two of Verdi's own compositions.

GIORGIO ALLEGRETTI/AGE FOTOSTOCK

note and said it would be performed as it was or not at all. The chief of police responded, saying: "I will not be the man to clip the wings of so promising a genius."

Emboldened, Verdi embarked on a series of great operas suffused with nationalism. *Attila* (1846) tells of the hated Huns' arrival in Italy in the fifth century. The final act of his *Macbeth* (1847) opens with its stirring "Patria oppressa" chorus: "Oppressed land of ours! . . . now you have become a tomb for your sons." Even as he enjoyed such success, however, Verdi's self-confidence was not boundless. In 1853, he still feared his latest opera, *La Traviata*, could be a flop.

### Rome Comes Together

In later life, Verdi became heavily involved in politics. In 1859, he was elected to a provincial council that paid an official visit to Piedmont, where he met the new "Father of the Homeland," King Victor Emmanuel II of Sardinia. The following year, the whole of the southern peninsula, known as the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, became part of Italy. Venice would follow in 1866, but Rome remained part of the Papal States.

Verdi accepted a position as representative in the first Italian parliament, but in 1865, he retired in order to focus on music. His next great work, *Don Carlos* (1867), reflected the desire to bring Rome into the unified nation. The opera includes a magnificent scene with two bass roles: a villain, Philip II of Spain, and an even worse villain, the Grand Inquisitor. The anti-Spanish theme was symbolic, as Spain had long ceased to exert influence over Italy—Verdi's real target was the church, whose power and greed, Verdi believed, was holding back the final goal of Italian nationalism.

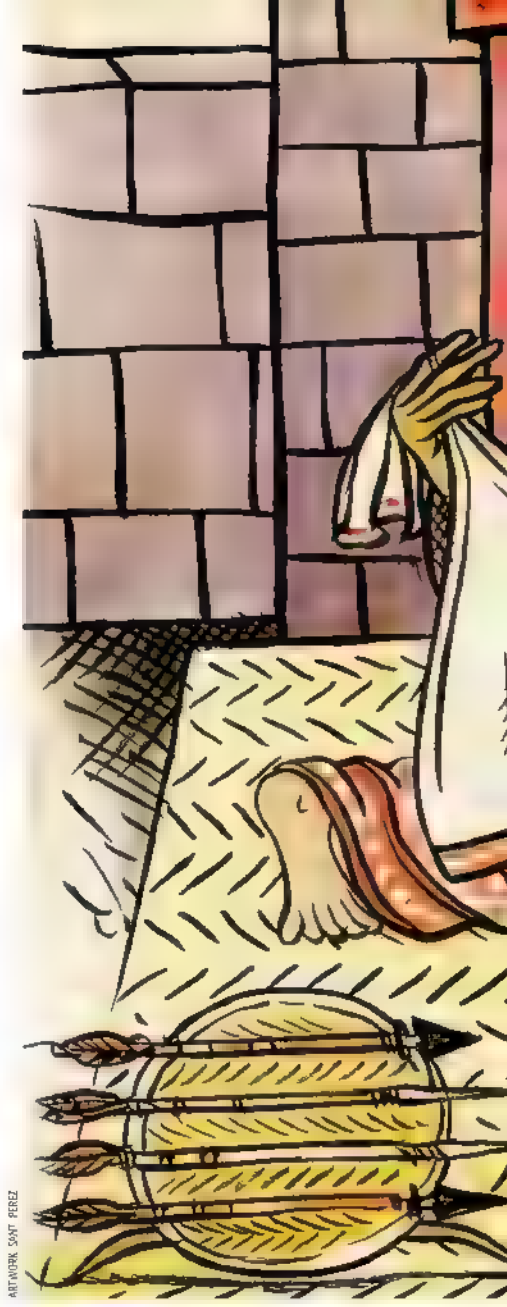
With *Don Carlos*, the composer was readying his public for the conquest of Rome, and the fall of the outdated papal states. Three years after *Don Carlos* premiered, on September 20, 1870, Italian troops entered Rome, and unification was finally complete.

The new Italian state recognized Verdi's colossal artistic and political contributions, appointing him a life senator. However, a radical to the end, Verdi was disappointed by the nation's social inequality and preferred to remain in Busseto, in a villa that is now a museum. The composer's unused train tickets to attend the Senate in Rome can still be seen there. Soon after his death, at the dawn of the 20th century, his neighbors gathered outside his home to sing the "Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves," the great gift he had bequeathed Italy.

*—Josep Palau*

# Call the Aztec Midwife

Hygiene and ritual marked every moment of life for pregnant Aztec women. The *tlamatlquiticitl*—midwife—offered those in her charge a remarkable 16th-century birthing plan, combining practical care, drugs for pain relief, and religious ceremonies.



ARTWORK: SANT PEREZ

Where do babies come from? The Aztecs' answer to the classic child's question was that they came from the 13th heaven—the highest heaven of all. Here, in this store of unborn souls, they waited until the gods decided to place them in their mother's belly.

Aztec adults also firmly believed in the divine supervision of childbirth, and that from the moment of conception, a fetus's healthy development depended on the will of the gods. Aztec society, whose powerful empire stretched over what is now southern Mexico from the 14th through 16th centuries, was suffused with religious customs. It was also highly practical and had devised a remarkable series of systems to monitor the mother and her unborn child.

## Homely Wisdom

Much of what is known of Aztec society comes from a book written by Bernardino de Sahagún, a Spanish friar living near what is now Mexico City. During the second part of the 16th century, Sahagún compiled a vast compendium on Aztec customs, entitled the *General History of the Things of New Spain*. The lavishly illustrated manuscript, whose three volumes are now kept in Florence, Italy, dealt in its sixth book with the complex methods and rituals of Aztec childbirth.

Central to Aztec obstetrics, the *General History* explains, was the *tlamatlquiticitl*, or midwife. While noblewomen could expect to be cared for by a midwifery team, women lower down the social scale would also have access to the services of this key figure in Aztec society, who would monitor the pregnancy.

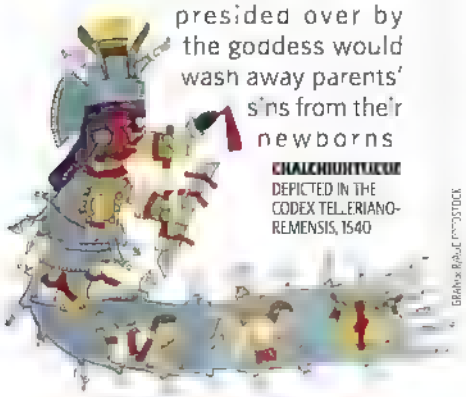
The tlamatlquiticitl paid regular visits to the pregnant woman in her home, where she would conduct gynecological examinations. If there was anything untoward, "she put the pregnant girl in a bath and pressed her belly to turn the baby if it was in the wrong position, moving it from one part to another."

In the case of a first-time mother, the midwife would also advise her on diet and other habits, such as making sure the water was not too hot when taking baths. She would recommend her charge to continue having sex until the seventh month of pregnancy "because if she abstained entirely from the carnal act, the baby would be born sickly and weak."

A mentor and wise confidante, the tlamatlquiticitl would prevent the future mother from lifting excess weight that could endanger the fetus, as well as recommending her "to avoid sorrow, anger and surprises so as not to miscarry or damage the baby."

## CLEANSER OF CHILDREN

**CHALCHIUHTLICUE,** which means "She Who Wears a Jade Skirt," was the Aztec goddess of rivers, lakes, and freshwater. She was also associated with infants and children. Naming rituals presided over by the goddess would wash away parents' sins from their newborns.



CHALCHIUHTLICUE DEPICTED IN THE CODEX TELLERIANO-REMENSIS, 1540

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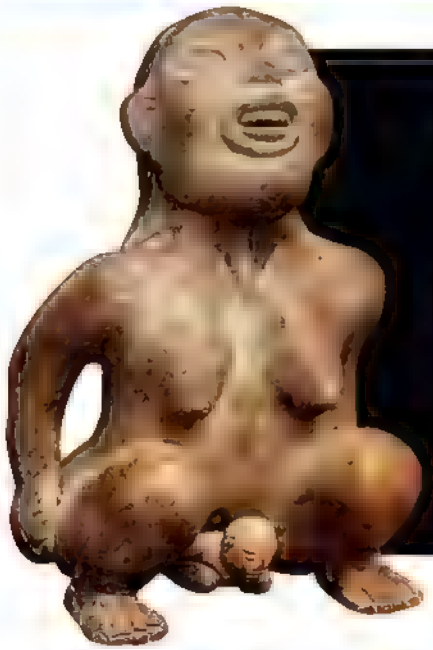


## Big Screen Birth Goddess

**WHEN ACQUIRED** in 1947 for the collection at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C., this statue of a goddess giving birth (left) was widely believed to be a pre-Columbian artifact representing Tlazolteotl, a complex Aztec goddess. An Earth deity, she also ruled over the areas of love, fertility, and lust. She displayed a cruel streak, causing madness among some mortals. But in her role as a childbirth deity, known as "the great woman in labor," she showed a kinder aspect. Today some scholars believe this statue is a fake and more likely dates to the 19th century. Whatever the provenance, this figure did secure a place in history: Hollywood history. It was used as the model for the golden idol, which Dr. Henry "Indiana" Jones retrieves in the opening sequence of the 1981 blockbuster movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

**BIRTHING FIGURE,** BELIEVED TO REPRESENT THE GODDESS TLAZOLTEOT... DUMBARTON OAKS COLLECTION
ORONOZ/ALBUM

## THE DEMONS OF DARKNESS

**ECLIPSES,** the Aztec believed, threatened pregnancy. The *Tzitzimitl*—astral deities visible when the sun was in eclipse—were often benign figures, but when the sun was covered, they turned into monsters. For their own safety, pregnant women stayed indoors during such episodes of cosmic disorder.

**AZTEC CALENDAR** OR SUN STONE, 1512. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY, MEXICO CITY.

DEA/ORONOZ/ALBUM

JOSE ENRIQUE MOLINA/AGE FOTOSTOCK

As the birth approached, the midwife would stay in the woman's home for four or five days to prepare the mother-to-be. The orderliness and cleanliness of Aztec society observed by the Spanish since their arrival featured strongly in childbirth customs, too. The woman's body, her hair, and the birthing room were all thoroughly cleaned. The tlamatlquiticitl would then prepare a steam bath in the *temazcal*—a kind of sauna with a low roof, located just outside the home—using special smoke-free firewood and aromatic plants. This would help the woman relax while the midwife checked the fetus's condition. Aztec skill with herbal medicine did much to reduce the trauma and pain of childbirth. Once the contractions started, a woman might be given tea made of *cioapatli*, an herb "that had the virtue of impelling or pushing the baby out." If, in spite of this, the woman was still in pain and not dilating, "they gave her half a finger of the tail of the animal called *tlacuatzin*. Then she would give birth easily."

**CIHUACOATL,** ASPECT OF THE GODDESS OF FERTILITY. QUAI BRANLY MUSEUM, PARIS

.CAA. FLORENCE

Midwives bathed the laboring women and prepared their *temazcal*—steam baths.

The woman squatted to give birth with the midwife behind her, holding her heels, so gravity would do some of the work of pushing the baby out and minimize the mother's effort. Sahagún notes admiringly that indigenous women seemed to give birth with much less effort and pain than Spanish women, and recovered so quickly that many quickly fell pregnant again soon afterward.

### First Days of Life

Once the baby was welcomed into the world, the tlamatlquiticitl looked to the hygiene of the mother and the newborn. First she took the mother back to the temazcal so she would sweat out toxins. Resins and aromatic plants both relaxed the mother and helped start milk production. Babies were washed so that Chalchiuhtlicue, goddess of the waters, would "cleanse his heart and make him good and clean."

# What Aztecs Expect When They're Expecting

**VIVIDLY ILLUSTRATED** with over 2,000 drawings, the *General History of the Things of New Spain*, compiled by Brother Bernardino de Sahagún in the 16th century, was a complete survey of Aztec culture. The sixth book focused on pregnancy and infant care with stages similar to what expectant mothers might find in modern pregnancy books.

***Giving Birth***

Throughout a pregnancy, the midwife would regularly examine the health of the mother-to-be and the fetus. During labor, medicinal plants were given to aid dilation and reduce pain.

***Naming***

After the birth, the father consulted a priest to help determine a newborn's name. Based on his astrological sign—in this case, the Rabbit—the child would be given a suitable moniker.

***Celebrating***

Relatives gathered together to eat, drink, and give thanks for a healthy child, considered a gift from the gods. Other mothers often gave a first-timer advice on rearing the child.

ARTWORK: SANTI PÉREZ

After delivery, the midwife stayed on for four more days to monitor the mother's milk supply. This was an essential precaution, as weaning would not take place until the child was two years or older, and the Aztec had no animals whose milk could be used as a substitute.

During those four days, practical tasks were carried out along with pious rituals. The placenta was buried in a corner of the home. If the newborn was a boy, the umbilical cord was given to a warrior to bury in enemy territory. Since the main occupation of Aztec men was war, this rite was supposed to fill the future warrior with strength and courage.

The relevant passages from the *Huehuetlatolli*, a collection of sayings, speeches, and advice from Aztec elders, was quoted soon after birth, including the words of welcome with which a midwife and grandparents should greet a newborn boy: "Your trade and skill is war; your role is to give the sun the blood of your enemies to drink and feed the earth, *Tlaltecuhtli*, with the bodies of your enemies." If the newborn baby was a girl, the umbilical cord was buried next to the fireplace to make her a good wife and mother. She was urged to "be to the home what the heart is to the body."

The naming ceremony was a key ritual in Aztec society. It was the solemn duty of the father to inform the priests of the day and time of birth, and they in turn consulted the *Tonalamatl*, a kind of almanac structured around the 260-day Aztec year, to discern the most appropriate name. The purpose of this, Sahagún records, "was to predict his good or ill fortune based on the qualities of the sign he was born under." The Aztec regarded the last five days of the year as a bad omen, so parents did all they could to ensure children born on those days were named after that period ended.

## Cradle to Grave

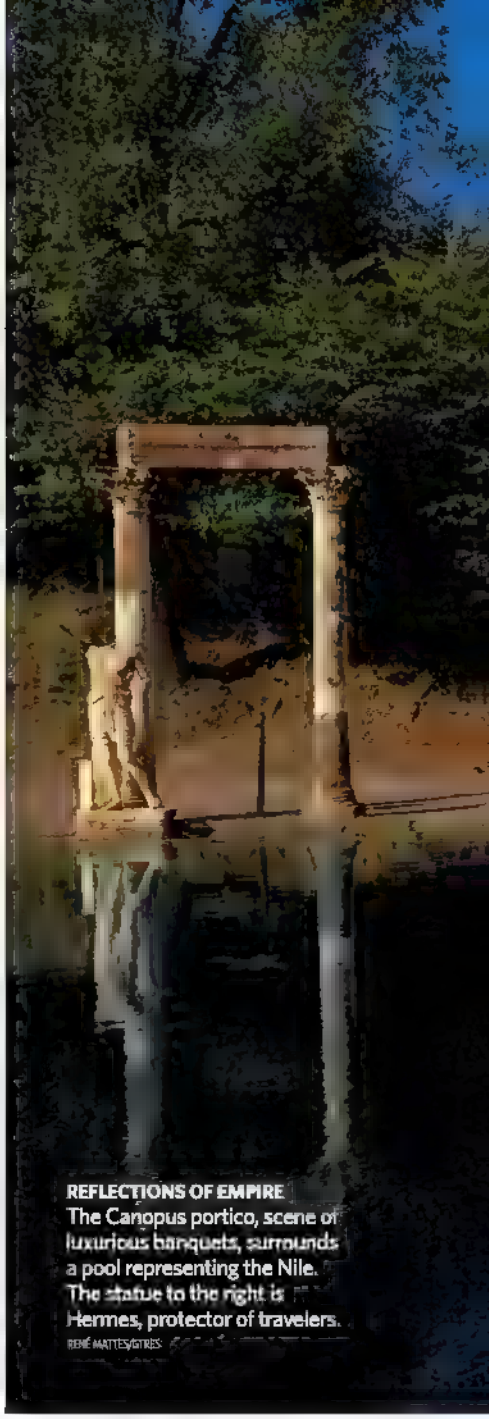
Despite the care provided throughout the pregnancy, childbirth was often lethal. If, in spite of all the effort made, the mother died in labor, she was regarded as a warrior who had died in combat. She was buried in a special temple at twilight, and her soul traveled to the house of the sun.

If the fetus was stillborn, "the midwife took a stone knife, called an *itztli*, cut the dead body up inside the mother and removed it in pieces," a grisly procedure that nevertheless "saved the mother from death." The Aztec believed babies who died during labor traveled to a place called Chichiualcuauhco, where a wet-nurse tree would feed them with its milk. There they would remain, until the gods sent them back to be born of another mother, and the cycle of birth and death turned once more.

—*Isabel Bueno*

# Hadrian's Villa: The World in His Backyard

When designing his magnificent residence at Tivoli, Emperor Hadrian drew on his travels to bring the empire home with him. Combining Eastern and Greek elements, his villa showcased the Roman Empire at the peak of its power.



**REFLECTIONS OF EMPIRE** The Canopus portico, scene of luxurious banquets, surrounds a pool representing the Nile. The statue to the right is Hermes, protector of travelers.
RENÉ MATTES/GTRES

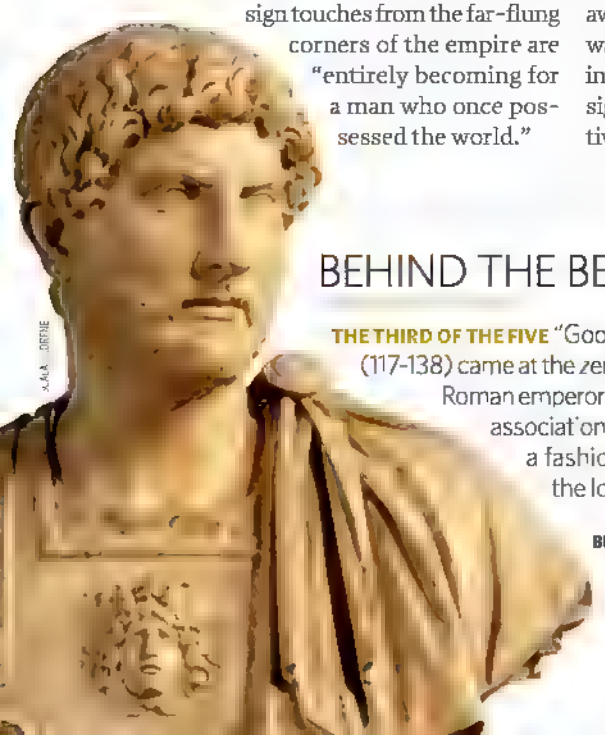
The emperor Hadrian was well known for building monuments across the Roman Empire, a territory that had reached its widest extent when his reign began in A.D. 117. Hadrian's Wall in Britain "and a host of other monuments, attest to his taste, activity, and power," French romantic writer Chateaubriand noted in 1803 on a visit to the emperor's villa at Tivoli near Rome. Hadrian's Villa's size, opulence, and design touches from the far-flung corners of the empire are "entirely becoming for a man who once possessed the world."

Although more carefully preserved since Chateaubriand wandered through its crumbling ruins (it's been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1999), Hadrian's Villa astounds visitors with its sheer size. Starting around A.D. 125, he oversaw the creation of 31 structures and extensive gardens, spread across a terrain of some seven square miles.

## An Exploring Emperor

Constructing elaborate rural houses away from the heat and bustle of Rome was nothing new among members of the imperial aristocracy. Their villas were designed for the all-important Roman activity of *otium*—leisure—encompassing eating and reading, as well as that quality preserved in modern Italian as *la dolce far niente*: the sweetness of doing nothing.

Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli, known during the imperial period by the Latin name Tibur, would not fill the standard role of the villa as a mere vacation home. The indefatigable Hadrian envisioned it as a place to unite business and pleasure, contemplating the beautiful hilly landscape while buckling down to the work of empire. Most important of all, he wanted to surround himself with reminders



## BEHIND THE BEARD

**THE THIRD OF THE FIVE** "Good Emperors," Hadrian's reign (117-138) came at the zenith of Roman power. The first Roman emperor to wear a full beard, Hadrian's association of facial hair with majesty set a fashion trend that has influenced the look of kingship ever since.

**BUST OF HADRIAN** SECOND CENTURY A.D., GALLERIA DEGLI UFFIZI, FLORENCE

of his astonishing travels through Spain, Egypt, the eastern provinces of the empire, and—of particular interest to this most Hellenist of emperors—Greece. He was, in the words of the scholar Tertullian, *omnium curiositatum explorator*, "an explorer of everything interesting," and his villa in Tivoli reflected his restless curiosity in the vast territories under his rule.

### The World at Home

The relocation of Hadrian's permanent palace to Tibur, about 20 miles northeast of Rome, had a clear rationale behind it. Various members of the emperor's inner circle had already built villas there. Good logistical reasons also recommended the site: The four main aqueducts that provided Rome with water passed through the town, guaranteeing the new villa's water supply, and nearby quarries provided the main building materials.

In and around its gardens, and lakes adorned with fountains and nymphs, the complex is brimming with breathtaking structures: porticoes, theaters, thermal baths, banqueting rooms, a library, and even an artificial island, all decorated with exquisite mosaics, busts, and sculptures of gods and heroes modeled on the best examples of Greek statuary.

The entry on Hadrian in the *Augustan History*, a fourth-century series of imperial biographies, describes a ruler fascinated by the philosophy and architecture of the empire's eastern provinces. The whole villa reflected the ideas and sensibilities of a highly cultured ruler. Among its many astonishing features is

# An Imperial Compound

Hadrian's Villa, was, in fact, a sprawling complex of more than 30 buildings, many of monumental size. Like any small city, it had baths, religious monuments, and recreational areas, all kept in order by an army of servants.

**1 PECILE**
The portico was designed as an after-dinner route to aid digestion. The pool, "Euripus," was named for the sea strait at Chalcis in Greece.

**2 SMALL PUBLIC BATHS**
Built near the emperor's own private baths, this facility—paved with marble and featuring an octagonal hall—was reserved for the nobility.

**3 GREAT PUBLIC BATHS**
Available to army officers and other non-noble Romans, these baths were paved in simple materials, comfortable rather than opulent.

**4 CANOPUS AND SERAPEUM**
At one end of the Canopus pool, the temple of Serapis featured a network of rooms and tunnels. It was thought to be a place of nighttime worship.

**5 GRAND TRAPEZE**
A warren of service tunnels was recently found under these gardens. They allowed food and fuel to be carried to all corners of the estate.

**6 IMPERIAL PALACE**
Once housing many artworks and mosaics, Hadrian's sprawling palace contained lavish reception rooms, his sleeping quarters, and private latrine.

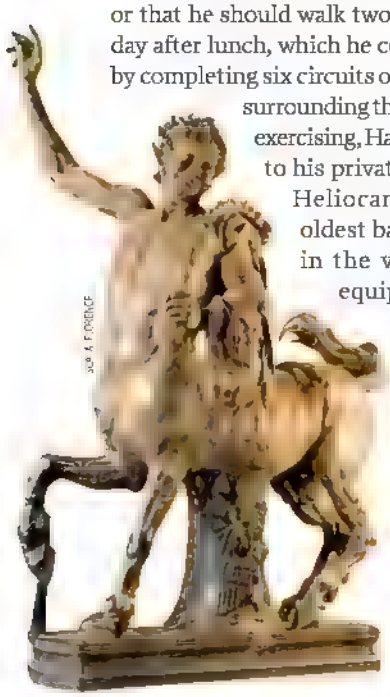
the elaborate portico known as the Canopus, where nighttime banquets were held. Its roof was supported by Corinthian columns, and caryatids, sculpted female figures like those of the Erechtheion on the Acropolis of Athens.

Named for the ancient city near Alexandria in Egypt, the Canopus's 390-foot-long pool is believed to represent the Nile, a river with bittersweet associations for the emperor, as this was where his lover, Antinous, had drowned during Hadrian's tour of Egypt in 130. The city of Canopus was home to a temple of the Greco-Egyptian god Serapis, of personal importance to Hadrian, who constructed his own Serapeum at the head of the pool.

The Villa lacked for nothing: It even included an exercise area, known as the Pecile, where the athletic emperor could carry out the Roman equivalent of the daily workout. It was equipped with a 330-foot-long rectangular pool. The

court doctors had advised the emperor that he should walk two miles every day after lunch, which he could achieve by completing six circuits of the portico surrounding the pool. After exercising, Hadrian retired to his private baths, the Heliocaminus. The oldest bath complex in the villa, it was equipped with a large sauna as well as the usual *frigidarium*, *tepidarium*, and *caldarium* (cold, warm, and hot rooms).

The vast residential complex was almost always teeming with people: members of the court, guests, and, of course, an army of servants. The servants' lodgings, and the way they moved around the complex, were ingeniously designed so that the villa's residents barely noticed they were there. Staff lived in hidden rooms, and moved around the site through a series of service tunnels, in order to distribute food or access the ovens that heated the hypocausts for the baths.



**YOUNG FURIETTI CENTAUR** FROM HADRIAN'S VILLA, MARBLE COPY OF A BRONZE GREEK ORIGINAL, SECOND CENTURY A.D.

## Roman replicas of Greek sculptures symbolize the spirit of the villa's cultural fusion.

### A Lasting Inspiration

Later emperors made use of the villa as a kind of Roman "Camp David," but the decline of the empire left it vulnerable to looters. The complex was sacked by the Ostrogoth King Totila in A.D. 544, its massive monuments abandoned and later purloined for their stones.

Thanks to its sheer size, however, many treasures passed unnoticed at the site for centuries. Pope Alexander VI found artworks there in the late 1400s, objects that inspired the great artists of the Renaissance and Baroque periods. It was not until 1736 that the marble sculptures known as the Furietti Centaurs were discovered. As Roman replicas of a Greek original, they symbolize the fusion of Hellenist and Latin cultures that became the guiding spirit in the building of Hadrian's perfect palace.

*—Elena Castillo*

# Winter Is Coming: The Deep Freeze of 1709

In the first months of 1709, Europe froze and stayed that way for months. People ice-skated on the canals of Venice, church bells broke when rung, and travelers could cross the Baltic Sea on horseback. This freakish winter ultimately claimed the lives of a vast number of Europeans and disrupted two major wars—but to this day, there is no conclusive theory for its cause.

It happened literally overnight in the first few days of 1709. On January 5, temperatures plummeted—not, perhaps, a surprise in European winter. But 1709 was no ordinary cold snap. Dawn broke the next morning on a continent that had frozen over from Italy to Scandinavia and from England to Russia, and would not warm up again for the next three months. During the worst winter in 500 years, extreme cold followed by food shortages caused hundreds of thousands of deaths in France alone, froze lagoons in the Mediterranean, and changed the course of a war. Shivering in England, the scholar William Derham wrote: "I believe the Frost was greater . . . than any other within the Memory of Man."

## French Freeze

The country most affected by the terrible cold was undoubtedly France. The year 1709 had already started badly. French peasants had been hit by poor harvests, taxes, and conscription for the War of the Spanish Succession. The cold snaps of late 1708 were as nothing to the crash in temperatures that took place over the night of January 5 to 6. In the following two weeks, snow would fall and thermometers in France would drop to a low of -5°F.

In the absence of weather forecasting,

**WHITEOUT** Muddy snow and [illegible] paralyzed Europe in 1709. Anonymous 18th-century painting from the Castello Sforzesco, Milan

MONDADORI/ALBUM

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

## STATE OF EMERGENCY

**THE GOVERNMENT OF FRANCE'S LOUIS XIV** was faced with a catastrophic food crisis triggered by the extremely cold winter. A special commission was appointed, charged with the urgent distribution of grain, presided over by Henri-François D'Aguesseau, depicted in the engraving above. Desperate times called for desperate measures. Anyone found hoarding grain could be condemned to hard labor on galleys or even face execution.

the authorities had no time to prepare for what became known as "Le Grand Hiver," and thousands succumbed to hypothermia before measures could be taken to help them. Animals were not spared either: Numerous livestock froze in their pens, barns, and coops.

The rivers, canal network, and ports froze, and snow reportedly blocked roads across France. In the port of Marseille on the Mediterranean coast, and at various points along the Rhone and Garonne Rivers, the ice was able to support the weight of laden carts, which places it around 11 inches thick. In cities that stopped receiving provisions, accounts circulated of desperate inhabitants forced to burn whatever furniture they had to keep themselves warm. Paris remained cut off from supplies for three months

Even the well-off, who could fall back on stocks of food and drink, found that the intense cold rendered them unusable. Bread, meat, and even some alcoholic drinks froze solid. Only hard liquors such as vodka, whiskey, and rum remained liquid. The climatic crisis held both rich and poor in its icy grip. The elite's sprawling mansions with large windows had been constructed for show, not practicality. In Versailles, the Duchess of Orleans, sister-in-law of King Louis XIV, wrote to a relative in Hanover: "The cold here is so fierce that it fairly defies description. I am sitting by a roaring fire, have a screen before the door, which is closed, so that I can sit here with a fur around my neck and my feet in a bearskin sack, and I am still shivering and can barely hold the pen. Never in my life have I seen a winter such as this one, which freezes the wine in bottles."

King Louis XIV organized bread handouts and made the nobles provide for the hungry.

**BUST OF LOUIS XIV** BY GIAN LORENZO BERNINI, PALACE OF VERSAILLES

DEA/ALBUM

### Baby, It's Cold Outside

Across the rest of Europe, many strange effects of the cold were observed. Numerous witnesses recorded how the abrupt drop in temperature made seemingly solid items brittle. Tree trunks would shatter with a startling cracking sound, as if an invisible woodcutter were hacking them down. Church bells when rung also fractured due to the extreme cold temperatures.

**COLD COMFORT**
The poor died in their hovels, and the rich shivered in their grand pa aces, such as Versa l es near Paris, where one correspondent could "barely hold the pen."

RÉUNION DES MUSÉES NATIONAUX/RMN-GRAND PALAIS/ART RESOURCE, NY/PHOTO: GÉRARD BLOT/CHRISTIAN JEAN

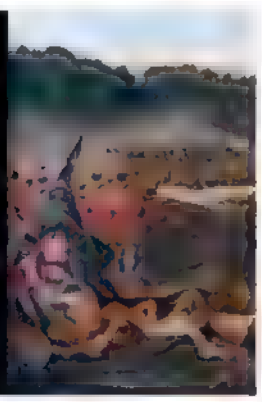
In London, "The Great Frost," as it came to be known, iced over the Thames River. The canals and port of Amsterdam suffered a similar fate. The Baltic Sea was solid for four whole months, and travelers were reported crossing on foot or by horse from Denmark to Sweden or Norway. Almost all the rivers in the north and center of Europe froze. Even the hot springs of Aachen in modern-day Germany iced up. Heavily laden wagons trundled across the lakes of Switzerland, and wolves ventured into villages looking for anything left to eat—which sometimes turned out to be villagers who had frozen to death.

In the Adriatic, the freeze left numerous ships trapped in the ice, their crews perishing from cold and hunger. In Venice, ice skates were used in place of the usual gondolas to get around the city. Rome and Florence were completely cut off by the heavy snowfalls. In Spain, the Ebro River iced over, and even balmy Valencia saw its olive trees destroyed by the cold.

The weather also had political ramifications. Hostilities between France and Britain in the War of the Spanish Succession were delayed until the weather warmed. More significantly, historians regard the victory of Peter the Great's Russia over Sweden at the Battle of Poltava in June 1709 as a decisive moment in Russia's transformation into a regional power. Peter owed his victory, in part, to a smaller, weaker Swedish army, many of whose soldiers had perished due to the winter's frigid temperatures.

## L'ÉTAT, C'EST FROID

**LOUIS XIV RULED FRANCE** for 72 years, and 1709 was one of the worst. His country bore the brunt of the deep freeze, its population and resources decimated. At the same time, his army faced major setbacks in the War of the Spanish Succession. In September 1709, France was defeated by Britain at the Battle of Malplaquet.



**BATTLE OF MALPLAQUET** SEPTEMBER 1709 (DETAIL), BY LOUIS LAGUERRE, 1713

# Winter Wasteland

**THE ITALIAN PAINTER AND ENGRAVER** Giuseppe Maria Mitelli (1634-1718) depicted the catastrophic events that spread through the whole of Europe: starvation, poverty, deadly temperatures, war, and sickness. Although the wealthy were affected by the cold, the suffering of the poor was much greater on all fronts.

BRITISH MUSEUM/SCALA, FLORENCE

① ***"Hunger and poverty"***
The diet of the poor, based on cereals and lacking in meat, caused widespread malnutrition and death.

② ***"Great cold and nakedness"***
Mitelli vividly depicts how the cold caused shortages of fuel and warm attire.

③ ***"War for all"***
War between Britain and France led to the loss of 30,000 lives at the Battle of Malplaquet in fall 1709.

④ ***"Illness and death"***
Disease preyed on a weakened population, extending the misery well into 1710.

## Spring Fever

The glacial conditions, however, were only the first of a series of woes to beset Europe that year. Temperatures remained abnormally low until mid-April, but the snow and ice, when they finally thawed, brought floods.

Disease thrived throughout the year. A flu epidemic had broken out in Rome in late 1708, and the following winter's cold and hunger only helped spread the virus, turning into a Europe-wide pandemic in 1709 and 1710. To compound the disaster, plague also arrived that year from the Ottoman Empire via Hungary.

But of all the ills stalking Europe, hunger was, in many ways, the worst. The consequences of the food shortage lingered throughout that year and into the next. Cereals, vines, vegetables, fruit trees, flocks, and herds were all laid to waste, and the next summer's harvest had not even been planted. The situation sparked hikes in grain prices, with prices rising sixfold during 1709.

In France, King Louis XIV organized handouts of bread and obliged the aristocracy to do the same. He also attempted to register all grain stores in order to avoid hoarding, sending out inspectors to ensure that the rules were obeyed. But against the unrelenting misery of the times, such measures must have seemed paltry. Episodes of violence ensued, and peasants who had been reduced to eating soup made of ferns formed gangs to raid bakeries and ambush grain convoys.

"The Great Frost" and its deadly aftermath unleashed tragic consequences for hundreds of thousands of people. In France, the population dropped in the course of 1709-1710, a period in which there were 600,000 more deaths than an average year at the time, and 200,000 fewer births—a population deficit that hobbled an already weak economy.

## Cause of the Cold

Its record as the coldest winter in Europe in half a millennium remains unsurpassed, a freakish freeze that still puzzles climatologists today. Various theories for the event have been put forward. In previous years, a number of volcanoes around Europe had erupted, including Teide (on the Canary Islands), Santorini (in the eastern Mediterranean), and Vesuvius (near Naples). Huge quantities of dust and ash in the atmosphere reduced the amount of sunlight reaching the Earth. The year 1709 also falls within the period known by climatologists as the Maunder Minimum (1645-1715), when the sun's emission of solar energy was significantly diminished. Whether these events combined to create Europe's glacial catastrophe that winter remains a matter of heated debate.

*—Juan José Sánchez Arreseigor*

**ORIGINAL SKYSCRAPERS**
Menkaure (front), Khafre (middle), and Khufu (the Great Pyramid) tower over sightseers, dwarfing even the sprawl of modern Cairo (far right).
GORDON PRESS

GIANTS OF
GIZA

WERNER FORMAN/STRES

**FAMILY TIES**

The pharaoh's relatives, such as Nefertiabet, Khufu's daughter—depicted on this relief (left) found in her tomb in Giza—were buried beside the sovereign's pyramid

Amelia Blanford Edwards was one of a stream of European travelers drawn to see the wonders of Egypt at the close of the 19th century. In her 1877 book, *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile*, she writes of the hot drive to the edge of the desert, until "the Great Pyramid, in all its unexpected bulk and majesty, towers close above one's head . . . The effect is as sudden as it is overwhelming. It shuts out the sky and the horizon. It shuts out all the other Pyramids. It shuts out everything but the sense of awe and wonder."

Most modern travelers would probably reach for similar words to pinpoint the sublime thrill of seeing the Pyramids at Giza in person today. They are so iconic, so astonishingly ancient, that it is hard to imagine that 4,600 years ago the plateau where they stand was a desolate, dune-covered wilderness where a scattering of tombs lay under the burning Egyptian sun. Along with the enigmatic Sphinx and other smaller tombs and monuments, Giza has three principal pyramids: Khufu (originally 481 feet high, and sometimes called Cheops, or the Great Pyramid); Khafre (471 feet); and Menkaure (213 feet). Emerging out of the complex dynastic needs of Egypt's 4th dynasty, they are the triumphant product of one of the most daring and innovative engineering projects the world has ever known.

## FATHERS AND SONS

**circa 2550 B.C.**

KHUFU, second king of Egypt's 4th dynasty, begins work on his pyramid. When complete, the massive tomb will measure 481 feet high, the biggest pyramid ever.

**circa 2530 B.C.**

DJEDEFRE, Khufu's son, holds power for only a few years. He commissions a pyramid north of Giza at Abu Ruwaysh, but the structure is never finished.

**circa 2520 B.C.**

KHAFRE, another son of Khufu, commissions the second pyramid at Giza. Although it is slightly smaller than Khufu's, it sits on higher ground, making it look taller.

IN HIS FATHER'S SHADOW
feet, Khafre's pyramid was originally a little lower than that of his father, Khufu. Its distinctive cap is formed of the white limestone with which all the Giza Pyramids were
circa 2490 B.C.
MENKAURE, after succeeding his father, places his pyramid next to Khafre's and his grandfather's. The contents of all three tombs will be looted.

DANITA DELIMONT/AGE FOTOSTOCK

**STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN**

The step pyramid in Saqqara, south of Giza, was Egypt's first. Built for the 3rd-dynasty pharaoh Djoser in 2650 B.C., the 204-foot structure was built of stone instead of traditional bricks.

The kings of the 4th dynasty ruled Egypt from around 2575 to 2465 B.C. Presiding over the golden age of the Old Kingdom, their center of power was the sophisticated Nile-side city of Memphis, about 15 miles south of Giza. The dynasty's second king, Khufu, ruled during a period of relative peace in Egypt, although the Greek historian Herodotus later depicted him and his son as cruel and proud.

Khufu's architects and engineers embarked on a project that transcends any other structure in the Bronze Age. Its completion utterly transformed the plateau. Khufu had selected it, in part, to distance himself from the magnificent pyramids built by his father, Snefru, in Dahshur, another necropolis near Memphis. Several other factors also made it an ideal site. The high plateau allowed greater visibility for the pyramid. It was near Heliopolis, basis of the cult of the sun god Re. Since there were already some tombs in Giza, the land had already been sanctified and so was fit for a pharaoh's tomb of a stature never seen before, or surpassed since.

After Khufu's death, his son Redjedef ruled for a short time and began work on a tomb in Abu Ruwaysh that was never finished. The next pharaoh, his brother Khafre, built a pyramid—as well as the Great Sphinx, some scholars claim—in Giza. The next generation followed the same pattern: Baufre, son of Redjedef, built his tomb outside of Giza, while Menkaure, Khafre's son, built his in Giza.

Each pharaoh who built in Giza did so in accordance with some simple rules that harmoniously ordered the three funerary complexes on the plateau: the facade of Khafre's high temple is aligned with the western face of Khufu's pyramid. And the facade of Menkaure's high temple is aligned with the western face of Khafre's pyramid. At the same time, the imaginary line that roughly joins the southeast corners of the three pyramids points toward the temple of Re in Heliopolis.

## Who Built the Pyramids?

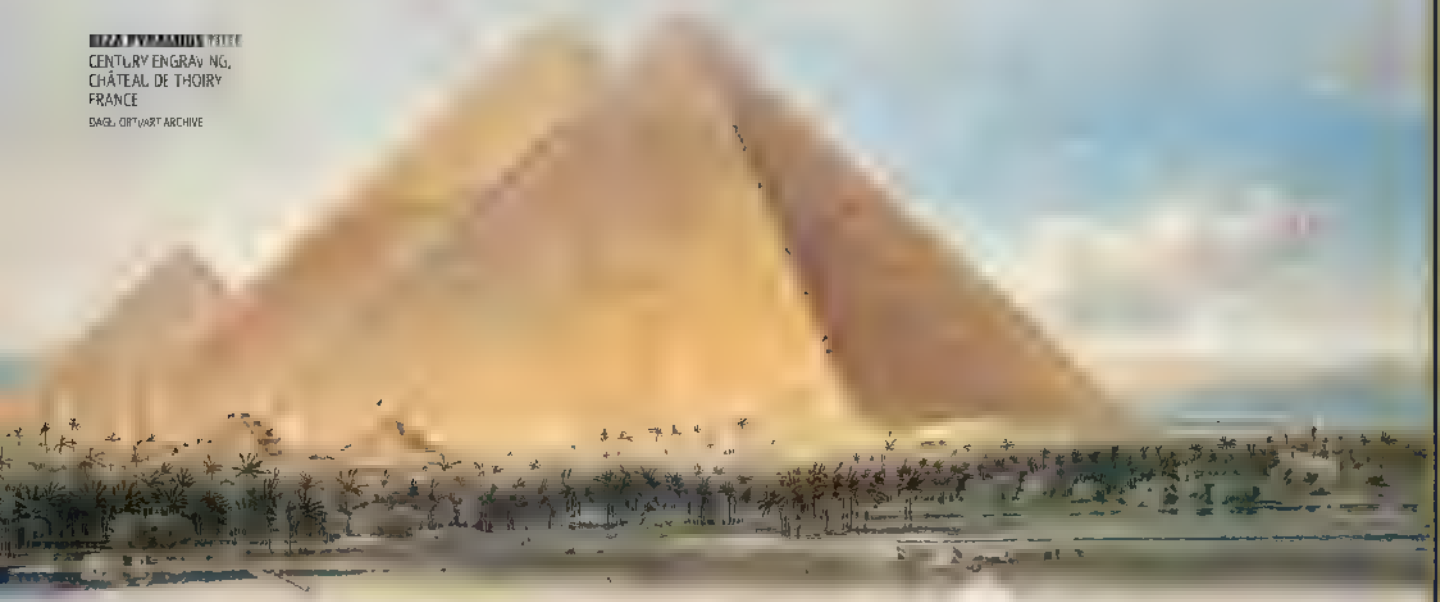
Herodotus claimed that construction of the Great Pyramid—today calculated at over six million tons of stone—was carried out using slave labor. It is now known this building was undertaken, in fact, by paid Egyptian laborers. The notion that Egyptian monuments were built by slaves—such as the plight of the Hebrew slaves recounted in the biblical book of Exodus—seems to have had currency in the ancient world.

Such colossal building projects would have left some kind of archaeological trace, and so it

# THE PHARAOHS' **ARCHITECTS**

The Old Kingdom pharaohs put their eternal life in the hands of architects gifted with engineering knowledge and vast creativity. Imhotep, a civil servant and mathematician, built the step pyramid as a tomb for his king, Djoser, while Khufu entrusted the Great Pyramid to his nephew, Hemiunu.

**GIZA PYRAMIDS** 19TH-CENTURY ENGRAVING, CHÂTEAU DE THOIRY FRANCE
BAGLIORI/ART ARCHIVE



## **IMHOTEP,** THE BUILDER GOD

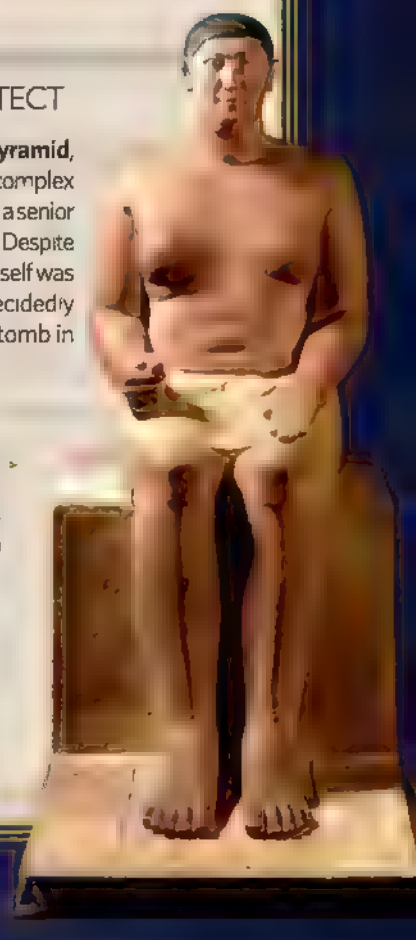
**Imhotep** was one of the leading minds of the 3rd dynasty, not only because he was the architect of the first pyramid to be built, the **Saqqara** step pyramid, but because he held senior positions in all areas of Egyptian society: religious, political, economic, and artistic. He also built the pyramid of Djoser's successor, **Sekhemkhet.** He was later deified as the god of medicine throughout Egypt in the Late Period.

## **HEMIUNU,** THE PORTLY ARCHITECT

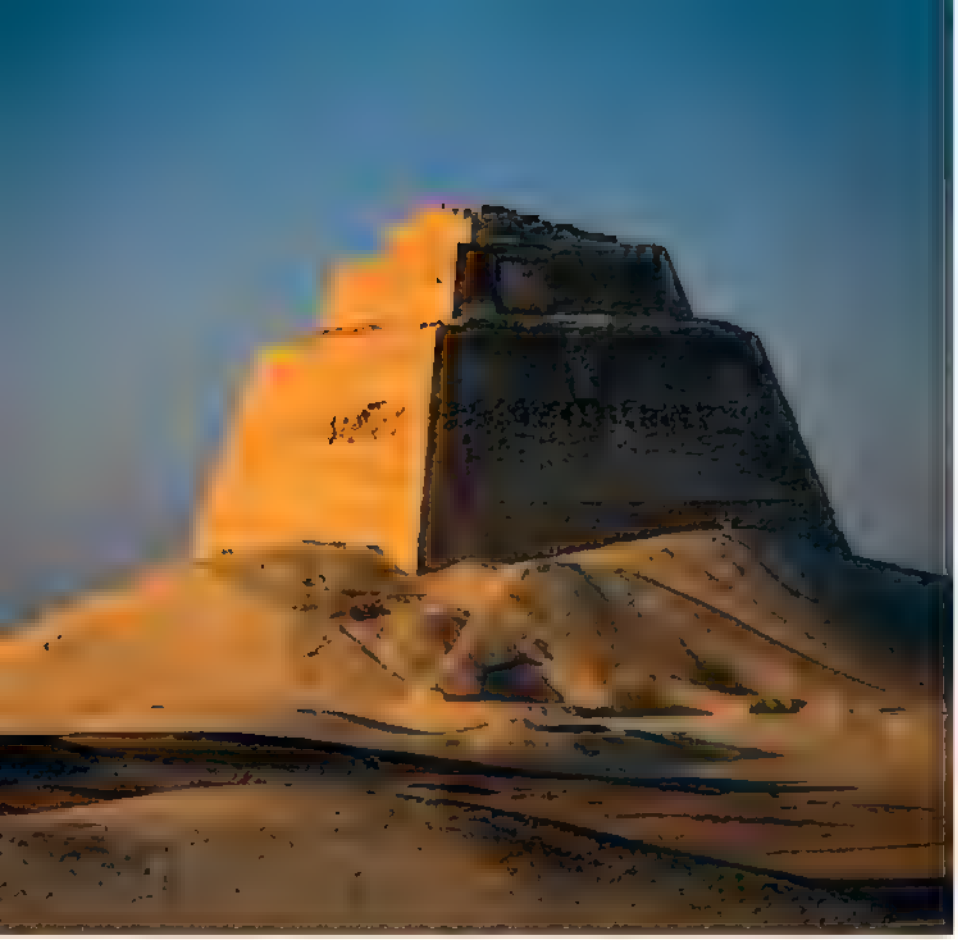
It is not known who designed the **Great Pyramid**, but the man responsible for supervising its complex construction was **Hemiunu,** Khufu's nephew, a senior civil servant who acted as the pharaoh's vizier. Despite the mystery surrounding Giza, **Hemiunu** himself was a flesh-and-blood man, as shown by his decidedly lifelike—and fleshy—statue, found in his tomb in Giza's west cemetery.

**IMHOTEP** BRONZE STATUETTE FROM EGYPT'S LATE PERIOD. ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM, BOLOGNA
DEA/ALBUM

**HEMIUNU** 4TH-DYNASTY LIMESTONE STATUE. PELIZAEUS MUSEUM, HILDESHEIM, GERMANY
DEA/ALBUM



**THE STEP PYRAMID** STANDS OVER PHARAOH DJOSER'S FUNERARY COMPLEX IN SAQQARA
BRIDGEMAN/AG



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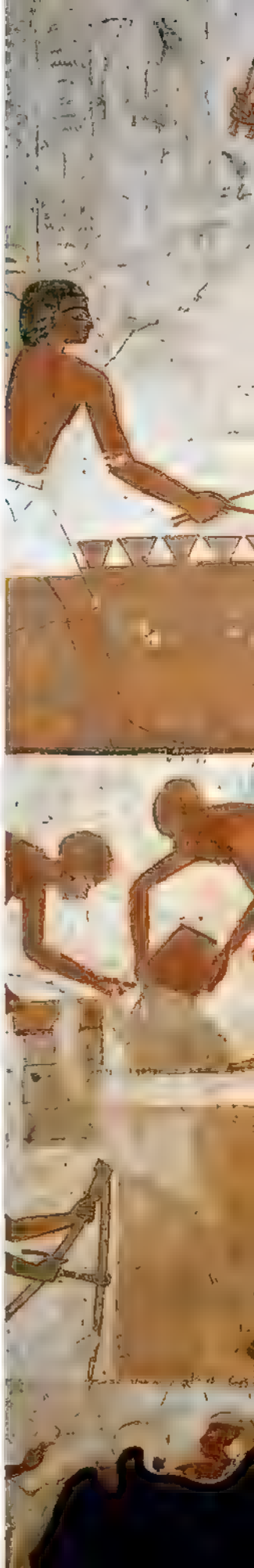
**PATRIARCH'S PYRAMID**

Snefru, Khufu's father, built several failed pyramids, such as this one in Meidum, before managing to construct one with smooth sides at Dahshur, near Memphis.



was amid huge excitement that in 1999 archaeologists started to uncover the village housing of the workmen who built the two later pyramids of Khafre and Menkaure. This followed the discovery of the workers' cemetery in 1990, which was divided into upper and lower parts according to the rank of the deceased.

Both village and cemetery offer archaeologists a mine of valuable data about the conditions in which the two smaller pyramids of Giza were built—data that, in turn, gives a working hypothesis as to the construction of the pyramid of Khufu. A study of workers' bones shows that the work was backbreaking—sometimes literally. Yet these laborers, far from being slaves, were privileged civil servants, and beneficiaries of a number of enviable perks.

Analyses show they enjoyed a protein-rich diet, practically unheard of among the rest of the Nile Valley's inhabitants. Evidence that broken limbs and fractures had been set correctly strongly suggests adequate medical care was provided. One of the skeletons in the cemetery had a leg amputated so precisely that experts estimate that the patient lived for some 20 years after the operation. The discovery of the workers' village has also enabled archaeologists to debunk another of Herodotus's somewhat fanciful claims: that 100,000 people built Khufu's pyramid. In fact, the village seems to have had a maximum capacity of 20,000 people, of whom perhaps half were dedicated to construction at any one time.

## Putting It Together

The daunting challenges of building such a structure, and efficiently marshaling thousands of workers, required meticulous planning. Scribes set about calculating the number of blocks that would be required to build a pyramid with the selected gradient—in the case of Khufu, the angle of the sides with the ground is 52 degrees—the kind of mathematical problem recorded in Egyptian mathematical papyri, and at which Egyptian civil servants excelled.

Graffiti and inscriptions at the site have also enabled scholars to piece together telling facts about life on this colossal construction site. Blocks found with dates from all seasons in the Egyptian calendar suggest the pyramids were built year-round and not just when the Nile was in flood.

There are many types of pyramids and not all were built in the same way. The lowest stones in

**MEN AT WORK**
On the lower panel of this mural in the tomb of Rekhmire, masons prepare bricks and stone blocks, illustrating how building materials could be transported. Luxor, 18th dynasty

© VANNINI/DEA/ALBUM

# INSIDE THE GREAT PYRAMID

While the exterior of Khufu's pyramid is what makes an impression on most visitors, its interior is no less awe-inspiring. A series of passages, including the Grand Gallery, links two main areas: the King's Chamber, which held Khufu's sarcophagus, and the so-called Queen's Chamber, believed to have housed a sacred statue of the pharaoh.

### ❶ *Mastabas*

Khufu's officials built rectangular tombs alongside their master's pyramid. The practice was continued by their successors, such as the mastaba (left) of Seshemnefer IV of the early 6th dynasty.

### ❷ *Queens' Pyramids*

Each standing around 100 feet high, the three small Queens' Pyramids contain, running north to south: Hetepheres, mother of Khufu (wife of Snefru); and Merityetes and Henutsen, two of Khufu's wives.

**WESTERN CEMETERY** Hemiunu, architect of the Great Pyramid, has his mastaba here.

### ❸ *Entrance*

The main entrance to the pyramid was on its northern side. In an attempt to camouflage it, the builders covered it with a vast slab of limestone. The ruse was discovered by looters later in antiquity.

### ❹ *Grand Gallery*

The initial ascending corridor, barely three feet high, opens out into this imposing gallery about 26 feet high but only six feet wide, with a roof formed of corbels. The passage leads to the King's Chamber.

**MASTABAS** laid out in an ordered series of avenues ❶

### 5 *King's Chamber*

Red granite lines the walls of the chamber, the same material of which the sarcophagus is made. This lies empty, either because the mummy was stolen long ago—or because Khufu was buried elsewhere.

### 6 *Queen's Chamber*

Some 17 feet high, this space, in fact, had nothing to do with any queen. Instead, it was believed to have held a statue containing the pharaoh's *ka*—the most vital part of the soul that survives the death of the body.

**RELIEVING LINTELS** Massive granite beams prevent the King's Chamber from being crushed by the weight of the pyramid

**ANTECHAMBER** originally blocked by vast blocks of granite

5

4

3

6

ASCENDING CORRIDOR

TUNNEL LATER CUT BY GRAVE ROBBERS

HIGH TEMPLE OF KHUFU

**BOAT PIT**
Now excavated and on display at the site, it was believed the boat buried here would carry Khufu into the afterlife.

2

PYRAMID OF HETEPHERES

PYRAMID OF MERIYETES

PYRAMID OF HENUTSEN

ARTWORK: MB CREATIVE

# HUNTING FOR A PHARAOH'S FACE

**HE ORDERED** the building of one of the biggest monuments in the world, one which bears his name 4,500 years after he ruled. His name appears on documents and on the few reliefs that remain on the entrance path to his funerary complex. Yet until a few years ago, there was only one tiny representation of Khufu, the man who built the Great Pyramid of Giza: an ivory carving just three inches high (right), an artifact considered—in a supremely ironic twist—as the smallest piece of Egyptian royal sculpture ever discovered. Recently, however, some specialists have suggested that a pair of limestone and granite stone heads from the Old Kingdom might be portraits of Khufu—a theory contested by other historians. Yet another hypothesis may give Khufu the biggest boost of all: According to Giza expert Rainer Stadelmann, the face of the Great Sphinx at Giza is not Khafre—as some scholars have argued—but Khufu himself, in divine form, protecting his pyramid.

**KHUFU,** IVORY FIGURINE, 4TH DYNASTY, EGYPTIAN MUSEUM, CAIRO

BAQL/ORTUART ARCHIVE

## THE LONG WALK

Deep inside Khufu's pyramid, the Grand Gallery (right) leads to the chamber where some believe a sarcophagus made from a block of hollowed out granite held Khufu's body

CORDON PRESS

Egypt's first ever pyramid—Djoser's step pyramid in Saqqara, built the century before Khufu's—are bricks. But as construction progressed, and engineers became more confident, they used larger blocks. The largest at Giza, weighing three tons, were those used to build Khafre's pyramid.

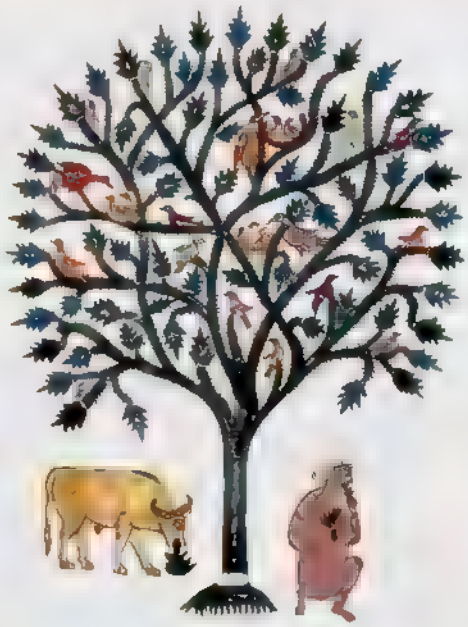
Much of the stonework in the Giza Pyramids came from a quarry barely half a mile to the south of the Great Pyramid of Khufu. The white limestone that once formed the outer casing had a longer journey to Giza, moved by boat along the Nile from Tura, eight miles away. When he was working in Karnak in the 1930s, the scholar Henri Chevrier discovered that a five-ton block can be dragged horizontally along a wet clay track by just six men. As pictures found in tombs have shown, blocks of that size were also sometimes pulled by oxen. The ramps by which they were raised onto the pyramid structure have also been depicted on the decoration of some tombs, and there is archaeological evidence for such ramps at Giza itself.

The geometry of a pyramid helped overcome the logistical problem of raising massive stones: As much as 40 percent of a pyramid's volume is concentrated in its bottom third. The raising of stone blocks by means of a ramp beyond the lower third of the structure was, however, a major challenge, and it is still not fully known how the Egyptians solved the problem. One solution would have been to use the building's inner step structure—visible today, since the outer casing stones have long disappeared—because then the blocks would only have had to be raised a little at a time, in the same way a heavy object can be eased up a staircase.

The rows making up Khufu's pyramid are slightly more than two feet high on average. So it is highly likely that, given sufficient manpower, levers could be used to raise large blocks into position—and so on, until the construction reached completion in the form of the pinnacle, known as the pyramidion, which historians believe was put in place in the course of a solemn ceremony.

The pyramidion atop Khufu has long been toppled, but is thought to have been of white Tura stone. It capped a total of two and a half million stone blocks, making it one of the most massive buildings on the planet, the only one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World that is still standing.

AUTHOR OF SEVERAL BOOKS ON PYRAMIDS AND DAILY LIFE IN ANCIENT EGYPT, JOSÉ MIGUEL PARRA HAS PARTICIPATED IN RECENT EXCAVATIONS AT LUXOR.



ENVY OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

# BABYLON

Ruled by Hammurabi, restored by Nebuchadrezzar, conquered by Cyrus—this city in the heart of Mesopotamia was both desired and despised, placing it at the center stage of the dawn of history.

JUAN LUIS MONTERO FENOLLÓS

**LEGENDS AND LORE**
Babylon was famous for its Hanging Gardens, which some believe may have actually been in the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, where this relief, now held in the British Museum, London, was found. Opposite: This 8th-century miniature, by the Spanish monk Beatus of Liébana, depicts the Bible story of Babylonian King Nebuchadrezzar eating grass as divine punishment.

**MONUMENTAL FOLLY**
Saddam Hussein's 1980s "reconstruction" of Nebuchadrezzar II's palace was built over the ruins of Babylon near Baghdad. Like many before him, Hussein left it in his own image, with little regard for historical fact.
GIOVANNI MEREGHETTI/AGE FOTOSTOCK

Mesopotamia—"the land between two rivers"—gave birth to many of the world's first great cities. The splendid city of Babylon, located between the waters of the Euphrates and the Tigris some 60 miles south of Baghdad, was one of them. Unlike the many towns that fell and disappeared, Babylon was resilient, rising from its own ashes time and again, even as new conquerors invaded and took over. The pleasure its occupiers enjoyed came at a price, however, since the highly desired Babylon would always be seen as a prize for the taking.

Babylon has resonated in Judeo-Christian culture for centuries. The books of the Old Testament recount the exile of the Jews to Babylon following the sack of Jerusalem, by whose waters they "sat down and wept." By the time of the New Testament, the city had become a potent symbol: the corrupt earthly twin city to the pure, heavenly New Jerusalem.

Outside the biblical tradition, Babylon intrigued Greek and Roman writers, who added to the rich store of legends that have come down to the present day. The Greek historian Herodotus wrote about Babylon in the fifth century B.C. A number of inconsistencies in his account have led many scholars to believe that he never traveled there and that his text may be closer to hearsay than historical fact. Popular tales of Babylon's fantastic structures, like the Tower of Babel and the Hanging Gardens, may also be products of legends and confusion. Yet to historians and archaeologists, Babylon is a real bricks-and-mortar place at the center of the vibrant Mesopotamian culture that it dominated for so many centuries.

## City of Cities

The site of Babylon was first identified in the 1800s in what is now Iraq. Later excavations, undertaken by the German archaeologist Robert Koldewey in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, established that the city had been built and rebuilt several times, most notably on a lavish scale by its king, Nebuchadrezzar II (reigned 605–561 B.C.). Koldewey's finds revealed an ancient locus of culture and political power. These excavations unearthed what was to become one of the most magnificent Babylonian landmarks built by Nebuchadrezzar II: the dazzling blue Ishtar Gate, now reconstructed and on display at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.

Babylon first rose to prominence in the late Bronze Age, around the beginning of the second millennium B.C., when it was occupied by people known as the Amorites. A series of strong Amorite kings—including King Hammurabi, famous for compiling the world's first legal code—enabled Babylon to eclipse the Sumerian capital, Ur, as the region's most powerful city. Although Babylon declined after Hammurabi's death, its

## TRANSFERS OF POWER

**19th-16th centuries B.C.**
The Amorites, including King Hammurabi, reign. The Hittites later conquer the city

**16th-11th centuries B.C.**
The Kassites conquer Babylon. Later, Chaldeans and Aramaeans struggle to control the city

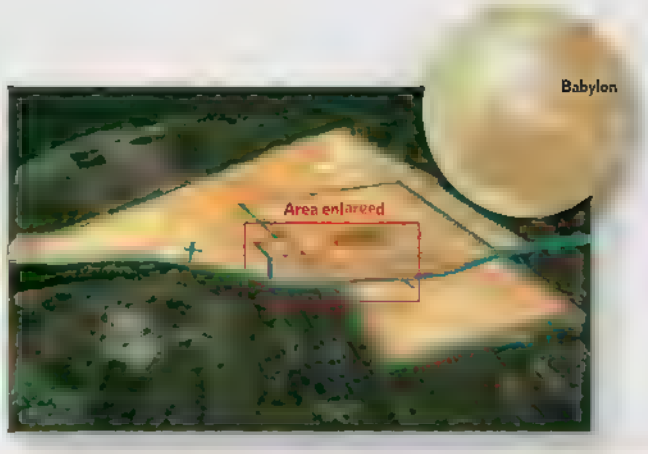
**11th-7th centuries B.C.**
A period of Assyrian rule is ended by the Chaldeans, who will flourish under Nebuchadrezzar II

**7th-6th centuries B.C.**
Babylon's golden age under Chaldean rule is ended by the Persian king Cyrus the Great in 539 B.C.

**To the 7th century A.D.**
Macedonians, Seleucids, and Sasanians control Babylon until the arrival of Islam

# BIGGER AND BETTER

Babylon reached its zenith under Nebuchadrezzar II, when its outer wall—built to the northeast of the city center, shown below—contained a total urban area of over three square miles. The king wanted its monuments to dazzle with a size and grandeur never seen before.

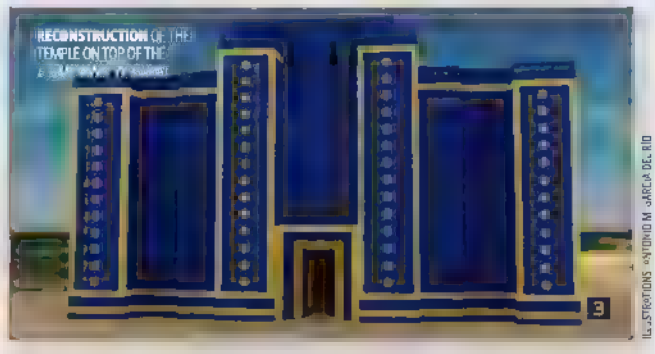


**1** ***Ishtar Gate***
The city's main entrance was decorated with blue brick and creatures called *mushussu*, an Akkadian dragon with a body made out of other animals.

**2** ***Processional Way***
This road led from the palaces to the temples. A statue of Marduk was paraded along it during the Babylonian New Year

**3** ***Etemenanki***
Completed by Nebuchadrezzar II, this ziggurat was consecrated to Marduk. A temple topped its six terraces.

**4** ***Esagila***
Babylon's principal deity Marduk, his wife Zarpanitu, and his son Nabu were all worshipped together at this temple complex




ILLUSTRATIONS: ANTONIO M. GARCÍA DEL RIO

importance as the capital of southern Mesopotamia, now known as Babylonia, would linger for millennia.

For the rest of the second millennium B.C., constant struggles popped up over control of Babylon. It was successively occupied by Hittites and Kassites; later, Chaldean tribesmen fought for dominance with another tribe, the Aramaeans from Syria (a tribe that had also sparred with Israel). By 1000 B.C., the Assyrians, who had established a powerful empire in northern Mesopotamia, gained the upper hand. But despite periods of stable rule, Babylon would always fall to someone else. Given this pattern of constant conquest—Cyrus the Great in the sixth century B.C., and Alexander the Great two hundred years later—it is perhaps more helpful to see the city not as one Babylon, but as several Babylons, the product of traditions built over thousands of years.

The Babylonians themselves were keenly aware of the great antiquity of their civilization. One of Nebuchadrezzar's successors, Nabonidus, is now known to modern historians as "the archaeologist king." A learned man, he restored the region's ancient architectural and cultural traditions, especially those from the Akkadian Empire, which had dominated Mesopotamia in the third millennium B.C.—a period that, from the perspective of his own era, would have already seemed in the distant past.

## Babylon's Golden Age

Babylon enjoyed its heyday during the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., when it was believed to be the largest city in the world. A new dynasty founded by a tribe known as the Chaldeans had wrested control from the Assyrians in the early 600s B.C. The second ruler of the Chaldean line became notorious for both cruelty and opulence: Nebuchadrezzar II, the king who sacked Jerusalem and sent the captive Jews to the capital of his new and increasingly powerful regional empire.

A successful military man, Nebuchadrezzar used the wealth he garnered from other lands to rebuild and glorify Babylon. He completed and strengthened the city's defenses, including digging a moat and building new city walls. Beautification projects were on the agenda as well. The grand Processional Way was paved with limestone, temples were renovated and rebuilt, and the glorious Ishtar Gate was erected. Constructed of glazed cobalt blue bricks and embellished with bulls and dragons, the city gate features an inscription, attributed to Nebuchadrezzar, that says: "I placed wild bulls and ferocious dragons in the gateways and thus adorned them with luxurious splendor so that people might gaze on them in wonder."

Babylonian citizens saw their city as a paradise—the center of the world and symbol of cosmic harmony that had come into existence when its supreme divinity, the god Marduk, defeated the forces of chaos. The spread of the cult of Marduk across Mesopotamia was proof of Babylon's prestige. No ancient city was so desired and feared, so admired and denigrated.

But in the Hebrew tradition, Nebuchadrezzar was a tyrant, and Babylon a torment. The king had conquered Jerusalem in the early sixth century B.C. and exiled the Hebrews to Babylon. The Bible says that he also stole sacred objects from the Jewish temple and took them back to Babylon to place in the temple of Marduk.

To punish his disrespect, the Bible recounts in the Book of Daniel how Nebuchadrezzar's line will fall. In the story, Belshazzar, the successor to the throne, holds a feast served on the sacred vessels looted from Jerusalem. During the festivities a ghostly hand appears, and strange writing appears on the wall, forming the mysterious words: *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.* The exile Daniel is brought in by the terrified king to interpret the writing on the wall. Daniel reads it as: "God has numbered the days of your kingdom . . . [it] is given to the Medes and Persians."

Daniel's prediction did come to pass: In 539 B.C., Babylon fell to the Persian king Cyrus the Great, and the Jews returned home from exile. The city would be conquered two centuries later by Alexander the Great in 331. Although Alexander had planned to make Babylon the capital of his empire, he died before that came to pass. The great city would eventually be abandoned by his successors, and the splendors of Babylon would pass into the realm of legend.

**PROTECTED BY MARDUK**

Calling down curses on anyone who defaces it, this ninth-century stela from Babylon is dedicated to a priest of Marduk by his son. British Museum, London

ERICH LESSING/ALBUM

**SPELLING DOOM**

The king turns in terror and a woman spills one of the sacred goblets looted from Jerusalem, as a ghostly hand foretells the fall of Babylon. The story from the Book of Daniel is brought to vivid life in Rembrandt's magnificent 1636-38 painting, "Belshazzar's Feast," held by the National Gallery, London.

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ממתינים
לנקמה
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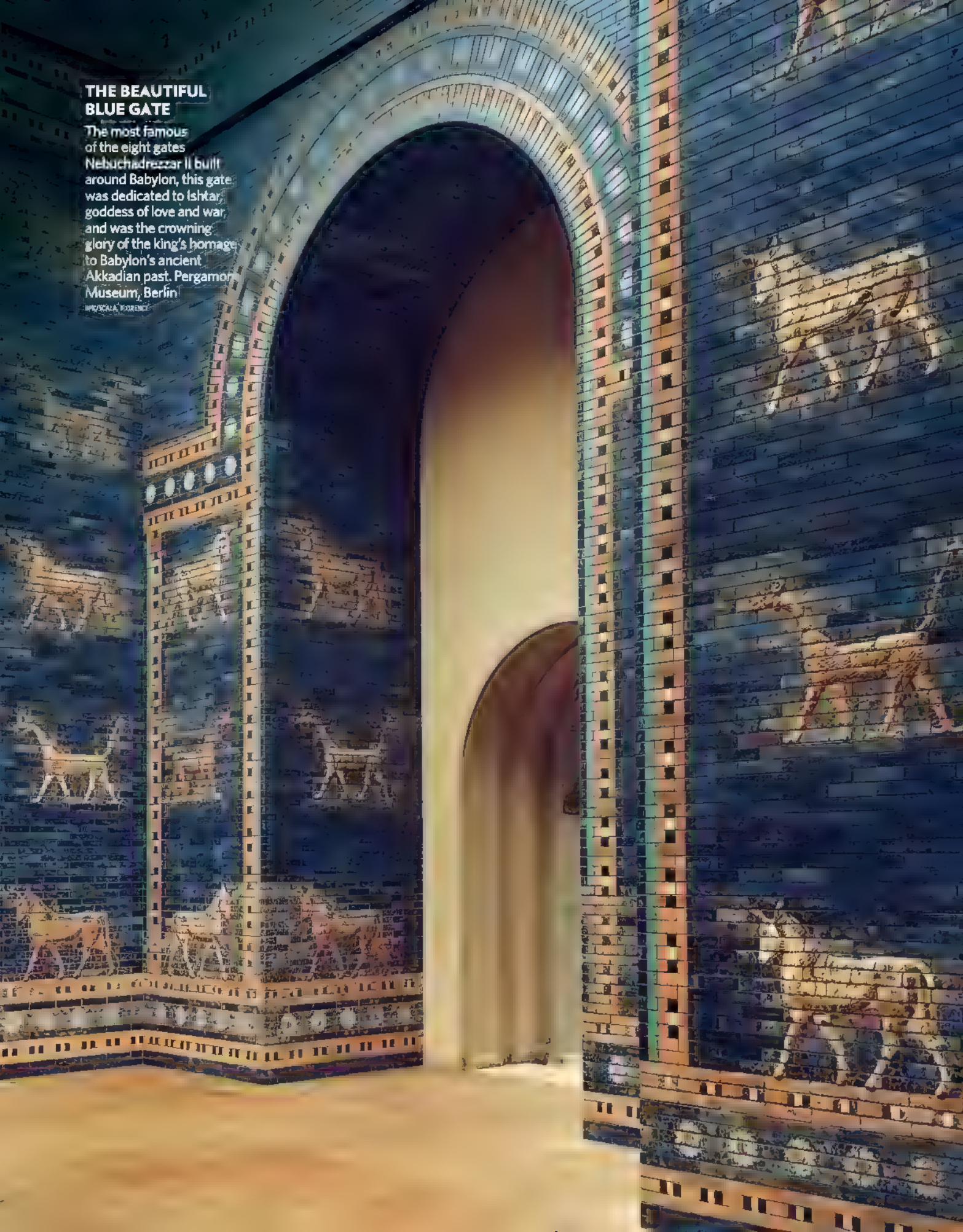


**THE BEAUTIFUL BLUE GATE**

The most famous of the eight gates Nebuchadrezzar II built around Babylon, this gate was dedicated to Ishtar, goddess of love and war, and was the crowning glory of the king's homage to Babylon's ancient Akkadian past. Pergamon Museum, Berlin

BPK/SCALA, FLORENCE

## Confusions and Truths

One of the most famous stories about Babylon is that of the Tower of Babel, a story that some biblical scholars believe may be based on a mistranslation, or ingenious pun. The Book of Genesis tells how the survivors of the Great Flood wanted to build a tower that would reach the heavens, but God smites the builders for their arrogance and disperses them over the Earth, where they are forced to speak many different languages.

The story originates in a Hebrew belief that the name Babel was formed from the Hebrew word meaning confusion, or mixing up (and from which the English word "babble" is derived). Ironically, this interpretation was itself a confusing of languages. In Akkadian, the root of the words Babylon and Babel does not mean to mix; it means "gateway of the gods."

Archaeologists believe that the tower referenced in the Bible story may be the Etemenanki, a giant ziggurat in Babylon dedicated to Marduk. Its name means, suggestively, the "temple of the foundation of heaven and earth," which dovetails with the names mentioned in the story. When it was surveyed in 1913, the Etemenanki revealed that the tower that supposedly reached right up to the heavens would have been, in reality, nearer 200 feet in height.

Another colorful story to come out of the ancient city is that of the fabulous Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. There are many theories surrounding the gardens, from their exact location to the identities of their builders. Some suggest the gardens formed a part of the royal palace in Babylon itself, while others believe they were built in another city altogether. One origin story claims that Nebuchadrezzar had them built for his wife, Amytis.

In the course of Koldewey's excavations of the ancient city, his team identified a mysterious structure in one corner of Babylon's southern palace. It was made of 14 long rooms with vaulted ceilings laid out in two rows. A complex of wells and channels were found at the site. Even amid the academic atmosphere of this project, a certain willingness to believe in Babylon's fantastic stories lingered. Was this the infrastructure that supplied the legendary Hanging Gardens of Babylon? The scholarly consensus has a rather more prosaic theory as to this structure's role: a storehouse used for the distribution of sesame oil, grain, dates, and spices.

So where in the city could those famous gardens have been? Perhaps nowhere at all. There is no text from Nebuchadrezzar II's time that refers to the building of any such gardens. The Greek historian Herodotus did not mention them, either. The only written references come much later, from scholars such as Diodorus Siculus, Quintus Curtius, Strabo, and Flavius Josephus, all writing at a time after Babylon had been abandoned.

It is, perhaps, little surprise that so much confusion surrounds Babylon when texts by Greek and Roman authors often confused Assyrians with Babylonians. When the first-century B.C. writer Diodorus Siculus describes the walls of Babylon, he actually appears to be describing the walls of Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian Empire. He describes a hunting scene that resembles no artwork found on the palaces in Babylon. It does, however, fit descriptions of the hunting reliefs discovered on Assyrian palaces in Nineveh.

This confusion may be due, in part, to the fact that some kings of Assyria, such as Sennacherib (reigned 704–681 B.C.), held the title of king of Babylon. More intriguingly still, a depiction of that Assyrian king found on a bas relief in Nineveh shows leafy gardens watered by an aqueduct. Could it be, then, that the famous gardens were in Nineveh all along?

Inconvenient historical realities have never discouraged rulers from reshaping the history of Babylon in their own image and generating new myths in the process. One of the most brazen examples is not from antiquity, but from the 1980s, when Saddam Hussein—then dictator of Iraq—set out to create a reconstruction of its royal palace. Like his predecessors, he left behind inscriptions on his building projects. On some of the bricks Hussein had inscribed in Arabic: *Built by Saddam, son of Nebuchadrezzar, to glorify Iraq.*

JUAN LUIS MONTERO FENOLLÓS IS PROFESSOR OF ANCIENT HISTORY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CORUÑA, SPAIN.

**THE TOWER OF BABEL**

Babylon's ziggurat, which became a symbol of human arrogance before God, was a favorite subject for artists through the centuries. Oil painting by Roelant Saverg, 1607, Nuremberg Museum

BPK SCALA, FLORENCE

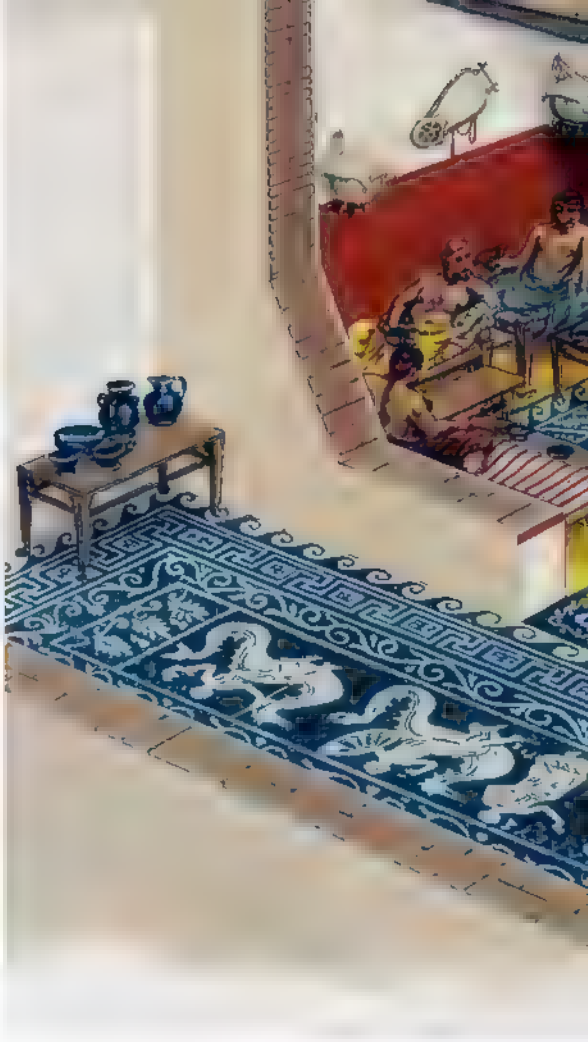
**WINING AND DINING**
A fifth-century B.C. Attic *kylix* (drinking cup) from the Berlin State Museum, showing guests at a symposium drinking wine. Depicted on a tetradrachm (below, right), the Olympian Dionysus, was the god of wine, an important part of the revelry at Greek feasts.
KYLIX: BPK/SCALA, FLORENCE; COIN: BRIDGEMAN/ACI

# BOYS' NIGHT IN

**In ancient Greece, wealthy men often gathered for decadent banquets called symposia. Not only an occasion for thinking and philosophizing, the symposium was also a place for enjoying women, wine, and song.**

FRANCISCO JAVIER MURCIA

The Greek historian Xenophon recounts in his *Symposium* that one day Socrates was out walking with some friends when they were approached by Callias, a wealthy Athenian. "I am about to give a dinner party . . . and I think my entertainment would shine much brighter if my dining room were graced with the presence of men like you, whose souls have been purified." At first, Socrates thought Callias was mocking his disheveled appearance, but the great man insisted. They thanked him for the invitation, without promising they would go. But when they saw his disappointment, they agreed to attend. They spent the evening at his home—eating, drinking, and talking—in one of the most characteristic social fixtures of the classical world: the symposium.



**SENSUAL MUSIC**

An *auletris* (flautist) performs at a symposium, as depicted on a fourth-century B.C. vessel from the Louvre, Paris. At some informal banquets, the flautists may have also offered sexual favors.

ERICH LESSING/ALBUM

As Xenophon's anecdote reveals, a symposium could be an informal affair, in which a host might invite friends he happened to bump into in the street or at the agora, the meeting place of Classical Greek cities. A guest might even bring one of his own friends along, too, without a formal invitation, a role that even had a special name in Greek: The *akletos* was made to feel as welcome as anyone else, provided he (in Classical Greece, dinner guests were always male and almost exclusively drawn from the aristocracy) enlivened the evening for the other guests with his entertaining conversation.

One of Plato's great works, also called the *Symposium,* examines the nature of love. Written around 375 B.C., it reveals the central importance of the feast to classical Greek culture. Like Xenophon's earlier work, Plato's is also set at the dinner party of a famous Athenian poet. One of the guests present, Aristodemus, is sometimes regarded as the token akletos—but Aristodemus is at pains to point out that he has been invited by his fellow guest Socrates, which, one assumes, was as good a recommendation as any guest could have.

Despite the relaxed nature of invitations, however, there were certain rituals that all aristocratic Athenians would unfailingly observe. Etiquette required guests to bathe and groom themselves before attending a banquet. Aristotle said it was "inappropriate to come to the symposium covered with sweat and dust." Even Socrates, famed for his simple clothing and preference for going unshod, smartened himself up for these occasions and reportedly wore sandals when heading out to a banquet.

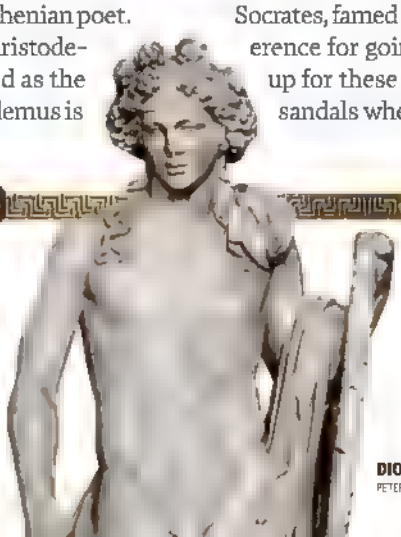
## CENTURIES OF THE SYMPOSIA

**9TH CENTURY B.C.**

In the *Iliad,* Homer describes the sumptuous banquets held by the Greek rulers. A century later the symposium becomes established as an aristocratic institution throughout Greece.

**7TH CENTURY B.C.**

A cup from this period is found on the island of Pithecusae (modern-day Ischia, Italy). Known as Nestor's cup, the inscription it bears promises that whoever drinks from it will be possessed by desire.



**DIONYSUS** ROMAN COPY OF GREEK ORIGINAL FROM 400 B.C.

PETER HORREE/ALAMY/AC

AKG/ALBUM

(RESPECTABLE) GIRLS ALLOWED

# THE MEN'S ROOM

Meaning "man's room," the *andron* was the fancy chamber at the center of wealthy Greek homes. In these lavish rooms, men would hold their symposia. To impress his guests, an aristocratic owner would have the walls painted with brightly colored frescoes and would commission intricate mosaics for the floors, as seen in this re-creation (left). The couches and side tables were well-crafted pieces of furniture. The divans (*klinae*) and cushions were placed next to the walls on raised platforms. There the guests would recline while they ate and debated all night. There were normally 7, 11, or 15 couches, each about the size of a single bed. Two guests could recline on each one, so a symposium could range in size from 14 to 30 men. Androns have been found in some houses near the acropolis in Athens and in other locations such as Olynthus in northern Greece

## The Feast Begins

The symposium, derived from the Greek words meaning "drinking together," might be held to mark any number of festive occasions: an athlete's triumph, the successful opening of a playwright's new tragedy, a family celebration, or the homecoming or departure of a friend.

At the host's home, a slave welcomed guests into the hall designed for such get-togethers: the *andron*, or "men's room." A slave would be present to wash their hands, take off their sandals, and offer them a couch on which to recline. Politeness dictated that once guests were settled, they would take a few moments to look around and praise the ceiling, decorations, and tapestries in the room. Then the dinner itself, *deipnon*, would be served. In Classical Greece this was simple, even frugal fare: Cheese, onions, olives, figs, and garlic were the essential dishes, along with mashed beans and lentils. Meat was served in bite-size pieces, which guests would eat with their fingers. There was no cutlery or napkins; diners wiped their fingers on slices of bread, which were then dropped for the household dogs. Dessert generally consisted of fruit such as grapes, figs, or perhaps honey-based sweets, all the food washed down with diluted Greek wine.

The feast itself was the prelude to the evening's real purpose. Once appetites were

**GETTING READY**

This fifth-century Attic *pelike*, a two-handled ceramic wine jug (below), depicts a slave carrying a *kline* (couch or divan) in preparation for a banquet to be held in the *andron*, or men's room, of his rich master's house.

AKG-IMAGES/ERICH LESSING

**CIRCA 450 B.C.**

As revealed by the *androns* found in houses in Athens and Piraeus, the symposium ceases to be the exclusive custom of the aristocracy and is adopted by lower-ranking rich men.

**336 B.C.**

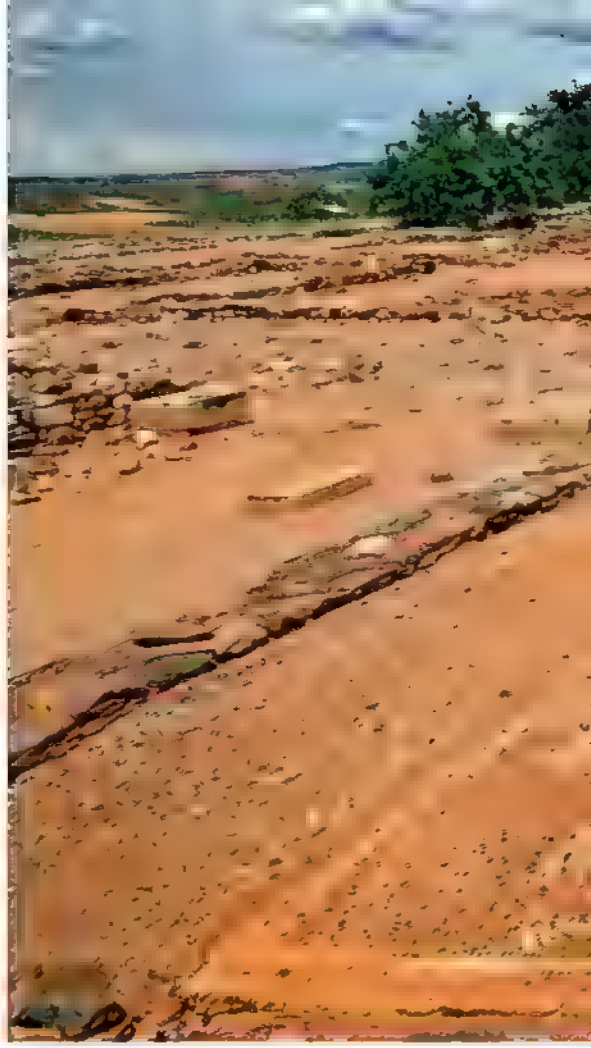
The father of Alexander the Great, King Philip II of Macedon is buried in a tomb in the necropolis at Vergina, which is laid out with many features of a symposium, such as cups and kraters.

**336-323 B.C.**

At the height of their power, Alexander the Great and his generals transform the informal symposium into a massive, often drunken banquet to flaunt their opulence and strength.

**TWO NAKED YOUNG MEN,** depicted on a krater from the sixth century B.C., serve wine mixed with water. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

BRIDGEMAN/ACI



### FISH RATHER THAN FLESH

Fish rather than meat dominated the dinner table in Classical Athens. Not only was fish a much cheaper source of protein, it was also prized in this seafaring culture. Below, three fish adorn a ceramic plate from the fourth century B.C.

BRIDGEMAN/ACI

sated, the slaves carried away the tables, tidied up the room, and replenished the wine jug, or krater, so the symposium itself could begin. A certain amount of revelry was expected, even demanded, but there was much debate over where high spirits crossed into boorishness. A fourth-century poet, Eubulus, observed that the behavior of diners could be kept within bounds if they limited themselves to only three servings of wine.

## Rites and Forfeits

The symposium was, however, more than just a dinner party. The distinctive Greek customs observed on such an occasion reflect a ritualistic element that distinguishes it from a mere social get-together or dinner party.

Following the meal, for example, guests would anoint themselves with perfume or put on garlands made of myrtle or flowers. Not just fashion accessories, these were believed to ease the headaches caused by drinking so much wine.

At a certain stage in the revels, a libation of undiluted wine was poured. This took the form of drinking a few sips, and then scattering drops of wine in honor of Zeus or any of the other Olympian gods. In the course of this ritual, a paean or hymn might also be sung to Apollo, reminding the guests of the religious origins of the symposium, when the dinner itself was preceded by a solemn sacrifice in which the animals to be eaten were killed.

The master of the symposium, called the *simposiarca*, was usually picked at random from among the guests. His role was to decide on the concentration of wine in the krater or how many cups each guest ought (or ought not) to drink. Forfeits were sometimes imposed for disobeying the simposiarca: dancing completely naked, for example, or running around the room with the flautist on one's back.

The Greeks did not drink pure wine. It was first mixed with water in the krater before being served in the communal cup. Generally speaking, the mixture was two parts wine to five parts water, or one part wine to three parts water. The dilution was a nod to moderation: It lengthened the evening's pleasure by ensuring the guests would be truly intoxicated only at the end of the night. Wine was sometimes mixed in a special vessel, a *psykter*, filled with cold water or even snow, to chill the drink. Usually a single cup was passed among the guests from left to right,

**A NIGHT ON THE TILES**

At Olynthus in northern Greece, this mosaic adorned the floor of a fifth-century B.C. andron, or men's room—the part of a house where symposia were held. Its central design depicts Pegasus ridden by the Greek hero Bellerophon, slaying the monstrous chimera.

HERCULES MILAS/ALAMY/AL

WINE AND CIVILIZATION

# WATERING THE WINE

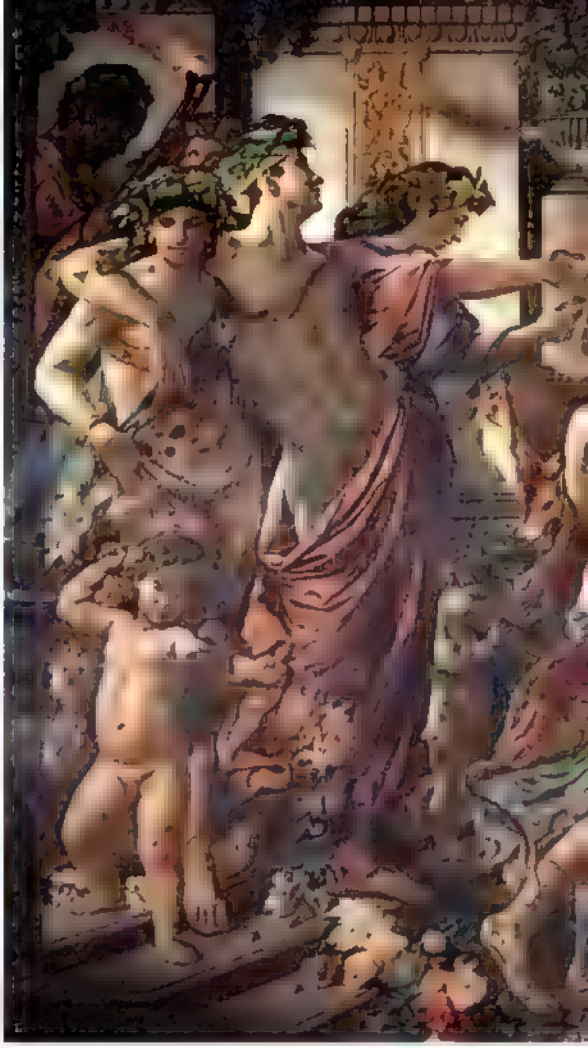
In Classical Greece, wine was aged in leather and clay containers, which gave it an acidic taste and raised the alcohol content to a very potent 16 percent. Mixing the wine with water weakened it and made it much less bitter. According to myth, it was the god Dionysus who taught King Amphictyon of Athens to dilute wine in this way. Drinking straight wine was seen as uncivilized, the kind of behavior their barbaric neighbors would indulge in. The Greeks called the practice "drinking Scythian-style." They believed that drinking undiluted wine was not only uncouth, but that the practice was also unsafe, potentially leading to madness.

**SILENI,** COMPANIONS OF THE GOD DIONYSUS, MAKING WINE. FOURTH CENTURY B.C. ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM, LECCE, ITALY

BRIDGEMAN/AL

**A HOST** M GHT NV TE GUESTS TO A FEAST AFTER BUMPING NTO THEM IN THE PUBL C MEETING PLACE OF CLASS CA. ATHENS KNOWN AS THE AGORA, RECONSTRJCTED IN THIS ILLUSTRATION.

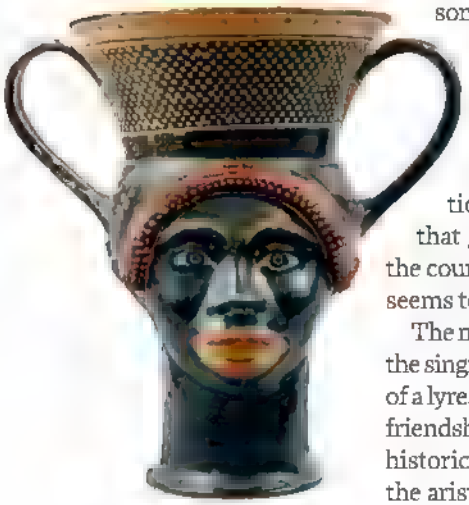
AKG/ALBUM



**HANDLING THEIR CUPS**

One of the cups used to drink watered-down wine at symposia was the *kantharos*, with two raised handles and a tall base. The vessel below portrays a woman with African features. Villa Giulia Museum, Rome

SCALA, FLORENCE



and a young slave filled the krater each time. During the symposium guests nibbled on snacks called *tragemata*—dried fruit, toasted beans, or chickpeas—which both absorbed the alcohol and built up a thirst for more.

## Wine, Women, and Song

Plato's account of his symposium is probably the distillation of many evenings spent in the company of the classical world's most brilliant and learned men, drinking and talking until late. Most symposia, however, would have been of a somewhat less philosophical intensity. Its guests typically chatted, telling each other riddles or drawing caricatures of one another.

Once the evening's earlier rituals of proper dress and robust conversation had passed, plenty of records show that good behavior often deteriorated over the course of the night. The third-serving rule seems to have been breached regularly.

The most common after-dinner activity was the singing of *skolia*, sung to the accompaniment of a lyre. These short songs typically celebrated friendship or the pleasures of wine, recounting historic events or exalting the social values of the aristocracy from whose ranks most guests were drawn. The word *skolion* means "sideways" in ancient Greek, a reference to how the guests took turns to sing, afterward passing a myrtle branch to the man reclining next to him who was to sing next.

One of the most popular games was known as *kottabos*. After finishing his cup, the guest picked it up by the handle and flicked the dregs at a target, usually another cup. As he did so, he uttered the name of his beloved, as it was believed that hitting the target boded well for his love life. There were more elaborate variants of the game: In one of them, the guests tried to sink small clay vessels floating in a large cup; in another, they shot at a saucer balanced on a metal bar. Xenophon writes how in 404 B.C., Theramenes, an aristocrat who had been condemned to death, proved his sangfroid by parodying the kottabos ritual with the cup of hemlock he had been forced to drink. According to Xenophon, he cried out: "To the health of my beloved Critias" (the name of the man who had condemned him to die).

Female flautists, known as *auletrides*, were brought in for the later stages. Pictures of symposia on vases show these women performing semi-naked between the reclining guests who,

THE "THIRD KRATER" RULE

## THE SOBER SIDE OF SYMPOSIA

Not all get-togethers involved debauchery. Plato was in favor of orderly, serious symposia. He wrote in his dialogue *Protagoras*: "When men of education gather to drink, you will not see any flautists or dancing girls. And even if they drink a lot, they are capable of talking and listening in an orderly fashion." Elsewhere, Plato is not so austere. In his *Symposium*, when Alcibiades arrives rolling drunk accompanied by dancing girls, he is still invited to join the discussion about love with Socrates. The eternal question of when drinking tips from merriment into debauchery was addressed in a fragment from a fourth-century play by Eubulus: "For sensible men I prepare only three kraters: one for health, the second for love and pleasure, and the third for sleep. After the third one is drained, wise men go home. The fourth krater is not mine any more—it belongs to bad behavior; the fifth is for shouting; the sixth is for rudeness and insults; the seventh is for fights."

hands behind their heads, seem mesmerized by the sensuality of the moment. Considering the flautists' menial status, it is highly likely they also performed sex acts.

### Bad Behavior

In Xenophon's *Symposium*, the rich host Callias hired an impresario who brought an entire troupe of entertainers: a flautist, a dancer who was an expert in acrobatics, and a handsome boy who played the lyre and danced, too. At the end of the evening, the dancers performed a kind of erotic dance, a pantomime of the wedding of Ariadne and Dionysus, the god of wine.

Other women who often attended symposia were *hetaera*, courtesans who became the regular companions of men who could pay for their services. They dazzled the men with their beauty and entertained them with their wit and refined conversation. The symposium gave them the opportunity to show off their charms and meet generous protectors. There were no illusions about their role in the proceedings. Athenaeus recounts that when some young men fought for the favors of a hetaera called Gnatena, she consoled the loser saying, "Cheer up lad, it is not as if you were fighting for a crown, just for the obligation to pay."

When the rowdier symposia ended, the guests went out to the street, wearing their garlands, and forming a drunken procession called a *komos*. Sometimes these got out of hand. The playwright Aristophanes, offering Athenians comic relief through his plays during the grim years of the Peloponnese wars, depicted a character in his play *The Wasps* who defied all the conventions of a good feast-attender: Ignoring the lighthearted attempts to restrain him, his komos takes the form of threatening to punch passersby. Despite attempts by city authorities to curtail such excesses, symposia continued to play a central role in aristocratic social relations until Roman times. They are still identifiable in the drinking societies of British universities or in fraternities in the United States.

A SPECIALIST IN CLASSICAL PHILOLOGY, FRANCISCO JAVIER MURCIA IS THE AUTHOR OF A RECENT HISTORY OF ANCIENT ATHENS.

**THINKERS AND DRINKERS**

Anselm Feuerbach's 1873 vision of Plato's *Symposium* shows a scantily clad Alcibiades (left) making his drunken entrance, while his laurel-crowned host, Agathon, beckons him to join the evening's discussion. Alte Nationa galer e, Berlin

BRIDGEMAN/AL

# FILLED

## A variety of vessels

The illustrations show the relative size of the vessels. Their heights range from 30 inches for a krater to five inches for a *kylix*.

**HYDRIA** SHOWING WOMEN FETCHING WATER, 5TH CENTURY B.C., VILLA GIULIA MUSEUM, ROME
DEA/SCALA, FLORENCE

**VOLUTE KRATER** DEPICTING MUSICIANS, 5TH CENTURY B.C., NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM, NAPLES
BRIDGEMAN

### ① Krater

This was a large recipient used to mix water and wine together. There were four shapes: volute, calyx, bell, and column kraters.

### ② Hydria

These pottery vessels were used to carry and store water. They had a narrow neck and a handle in the middle for pouring.

# TO THE BRIM

kept the cups charged in Classical Greece.

**PSYKTER** DEPICTING SATYRS DRINKING WINE FROM PITCHERS, 5TH CENTURY B.C., BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON
BRITISH MUSEUM/SCALA, FLORENCE

**OLPE** DEPICTING A HUNTER WITH HIS KILL, ACCOMPANIED BY HIS DOG, 6TH CENTURY B.C., BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON
BRITISH MUSEUM/SCALA, FLORENCE

**KYLIX** SHOWING A MAN BALANCING DRINKING VESSELS, 6TH CENTURY B.C., ALLEN MEMORIAL ART MUSEUM, OHIO
BRIDGEMAN/AC

**SKYPHOS** DEPICTING A SILENUS PUSHING A WOMAN ON A SWING, 4TH CENTURY B.C., STATE MUSEUMS, BERLIN
BRIDGEMAN/SCALA, FLORENCE

### ③ Psykter

Recognizable from its bulbous shape and its high, narrow base, it was used to cool wine by adding cold water or even ice, when available.

### ④ Olpe

A common type of *oenochoe* (wine jug) with a high handle. It was also used to transfer the watered-down wine from the krater to the cups.

### ⑤ Kylix

One of several types of cups used to drink the water and wine mixture. It is broad and shallow with a tall base and two large handles.

### ⑥ Skyphos

Another of the vessels used for drinking at banquets. A *skyphos* is a deep cup with a large capacity and two side handles.

**FLAGELLUM DEI**

Attila's demonic legacy—he was known as the "Scourge of God"—is shown on this 16th-century medal, on which the Hun leader sports horns and pointed ears.

RMN-GRAND PALAIS

# ATTILA AGAINST ROME

## *Formation of a Fateful Alliance*

**For years, the unstoppable Attila sacked city after city until a Germanic-Roman alliance halted the Huns in A.D. 451. The victory underlined a hard truth for the tottering empire: The barbarian threat could only be held at bay with the help of other barbarians.**

BORJA PELEGERO

Everybody may know the name "Attila the Hun," but nobody knows where he's buried. Finding him would be quite the prize, since historic accounts of his funeral are impressive: Attila's body was reportedly entombed in a gold coffin, which was then placed in a silver coffin, which was in turn placed in an outer coffin of iron, a fitting burial for the most feared man of the fifth century.

Much of Attila's infamy comes from his relentless campaign westward into Europe where he pillaged the riches of the Roman Empire. But he was stopped by a confederation of Roman soldiers and Germanic tribes. Defeating the great Attila might seem to be a sign of Rome's strength, but many historians believe this moment reveals Rome's true weakness, brought on by centuries of imperial mismanagement and overextension.

**AURELIANUM'S LUCKY ESCAPE**

After a string of cities fell to Attila's merciless onslaught, his forces were poised to take Aurelianum (modern-day Orleans, above), occupied by Alans. Roman commander Aetius arrived, and the siege was lifted.

BBSARRARI/GETTY IMAGES

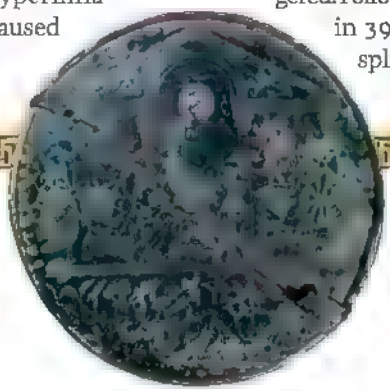
## An Empire in Crisis

Relations between the later Roman Empire and the barbarian tribes that massed on its northern border have been commonly portrayed as a straightforward, mutual hostility. In reality, the complex relationship between Rome and its neighbors grew more interconnected through the third and fourth centuries A.D.

A healthy Roman respect for Germanic tribes dates back at least to the time of Julius Caesar, who admired the rugged courage of his opponents in Gaul. Border skirmishes continued throughout the early empire, but the barbarian threat started to erode imperial authority itself during a series of disastrous reigns in the third century. During this time, severe economic crises weakened central Roman rule. Strapped for cash, successive emperors debased the currency to gain short-term financial relief, but instead sparked hyperinflation that disrupted trade and caused more economic turmoil.

Capitalizing on the chaos, Goths and other Germanic tribes began attacking Roman borders. To help repel these attacks, Rome began forming complex alliances and counter-alliances with the barbarians. More and more, the empire relied on German mercenaries to serve in its army. These men often found themselves defending the frontier against their own people.

Although order was restored by the accession of Diocletian in 284, the empire never recovered its former economic strength. The relationships formed with Rome's northern neighbors lingered. Following the death of Theodosius I in 395, the entire Roman world split in half: the Western Roman



**FOURTH-CENTURY COIN** BEARING THEODOSIUS I AND HIS SONS

ORONOZ/ALBUM

## BARBARIANS IN CONTROL

**In 395**

Emperor Theodosius I dies. The Roman Empire is divided into two parts: the Eastern Empire, governed by his son Arcadius, and the Western Empire, by his son Honorius.

**Until 450**

Barbarian peoples—Swabians, Vandals, Alans, Visigoths, Franks, and Burgundians—cross the border into the Western Roman Empire to settle. At times they put themselves at the service of Rome.

MAP: EOSGIS.COM

EMPIRE OF THE HUNS

## LIVE FAST, DIE YOUNG

For seven short decades, the Huns were a dominant power in Europe, but their notoriety has survived for centuries. The Huns came west from Asia and first moved into southeastern Europe in 370. They quickly expanded their territory with lightning-fast cavalry and accurate archers, inspiring fear wherever they went. At its height, the empire of Attila stretched from the Rhine River all the way to the Black Sea. In addition to their military might, the Huns were skilled at forging alliances with local tribal leaders—such as Alans, Ostrogoths, and Gepids—by exchanging goods for loyalty. To maintain these "friendships," the Huns needed to conquer more land to gain more riches to pay their "friends." Under Attila, they succeeded, but after his death in 453, the Huns quickly lost their dominance. In 454, vassal tribes crushed the Huns at the Battle of Nedao, and Hun supremacy of the region crumbled very soon after.

Empire—centering on the new imperial capitals of Milan and Ravenna—and the Eastern Roman Empire ruled from Constantinople.

### The Huns Are Coming

Complex power struggles ensued between the Eastern and Western Empires, which were both facing external military threats. In the 370s, reports from the imperial border at the Danube River told of a terrifying new enemy: the Huns, who had arrived so swiftly it seemed they came out of nowhere. This fierce nomadic people swept in from the east and conquered their way to the Goth territories that lay north of the Danube.

In the face of this threat, the Goths pressured the Eastern Roman emperor, Valens, to allow them to cross over the river border and resettle on Roman lands. Distracted by an attack from the Persians, Valens rashly agreed—but instead of inviting in a new population of biddable subjects, who would pay taxes and help defend the border, Valens had created an enemy within: In 378, the Goths revolted, defeating and killing him at the Battle of Adrianople.

Attempts to turn them into loyal defenders of the frontier largely failed, culminating in the Goth invasion of Italy and the sack of Rome in 410. As Gothic hordes looted the capital that year, the Huns were settling down on the

### A HELMET TO FACE THE HUNS

This fourth-century Roman helmet, known as a *Berkasovo*, is made of iron and silver and was found in Serbia. Helmets like these, worn by the cavalry, were used at the time of Attila's invasion of Gaul.

ALAMY/AC

451

Attila, king of the Huns from 445, invades Gaul. At the head of a Roman-Germanic coalition, Aetius defeats Attila at the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, after which Attila retreats with his loot.

452

The Huns sack northern Italy but leave the Italian peninsula without attacking Rome itself. The following year, Attila dies. After his death, the Hun Empire quickly disintegrates.

476

Odoacer, a German warrior possibly of Scirian origins, becomes king of Italy, deposing the emperor on September 4. From that day, the Western Roman Empire ceases to exist.

THE PORTA NIGRA (BLACK GATE) DATES TO THE ROMAN ERA. IT STANDS IN THE CITY OF TRIER, SACKED BY ATTILA ON HIS WAY TO GAUL.

THOMAS ROBBIN/AGE FOTOSTOCK

## CITY SACKERS

The Huns used both artillery and assault towers to begin their attacks on walled cities. Below, a fifth-century wooden carving shows a relief of a city being defended from a barbarian siege. Museum of Byzantine Art, Berlin

BPK/SCALA, FLORENCE

grasslands of their new home in modern-day Hungary. Among them was a young boy—a member of the ruling family—named Attila.

### Giant Steppes

Historians believe that the Huns are related to the Xiongnu, a tribe who lived on the steppes of eastern Asia near modern-day Mongolia. In the early fourth century, they began moving westward across the steppe into Europe until the Roman border stopped their advance.

One of the earliest descriptions of them comes from the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus, who played up some of their more uncivilized traits. He described a people who warmed up meat by heating it between their thighs and wore crude clothes made of "skins of field-mice sewn together." Other Roman sources emphasized their formidable military skills as mounted archers.

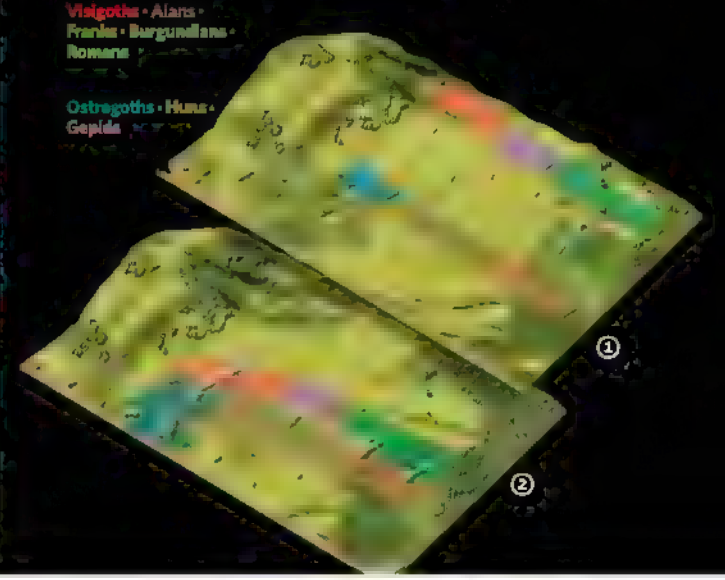
In 445, having inherited lands that stretched from modern-day Germany to the Black Sea in the east, Attila began his rule by murdering his brother Bleda to take sole leadership of the Huns. The early years of his reign were marked by a campaign of terror against the Eastern Roman Empire, alternating outrageous demands for vast amounts of tribute with devastating incursions into imperial lands, penetrating deep into Greece in 447. Having wrung important concessions from Constantinople, Attila then turned his attention to the Western Empire, and especially Gaul.

If the Hun king were looking for an excuse to invade the Western Empire, he got one in the form of Honoria, the strong-willed sister of the Western Roman Emperor Valentinian III. Exiled to Constantinople by her brother, Honoria tried to escape by letting it be known to Attila that he could marry her. Although the emperor foiled her plan, Attila artfully considered Honoria his wife and demanded half of the Western Empire as her dowry. Valentinian's flat refusal was reason enough for Attila to launch his invasion of Gaul. Eventually, he hoped, the chaos he would unleash there would force Valentinian to pay him to leave.

Attila saw Gaul as an easy target. The local population was composed of Visigoths and other tribes who had settled there, a complex mix that he assumed would thwart Rome's attempts to mount an effective defense. During the spring of 451, Attila put his plan into action and began sacking the cities of northern Gaul one after another. His expectation of a weak opposition,

## Face-off on the Catalaunian Plains

Two fateful moments marked the battle, as shown in the maps below. The first was a failed **charge** ① by Attila's troops who were unable to break the enemy's formation. The second event was the **Visigoth counterattack** ② which did succeed in breaking the line formed by the Huns and their allies. The illustration (left) re-creates the first Hun assault, conveying the fearsome spectacle of the mounted archers bearing down on the Roman lines.




WATERCOLOR: PETER DENNIS/OSPREY PUBLISHING; ILLUSTRATION: EOSGIS.COM

MISTAKEN IDENTITIES

## GENERAL CONFUSION

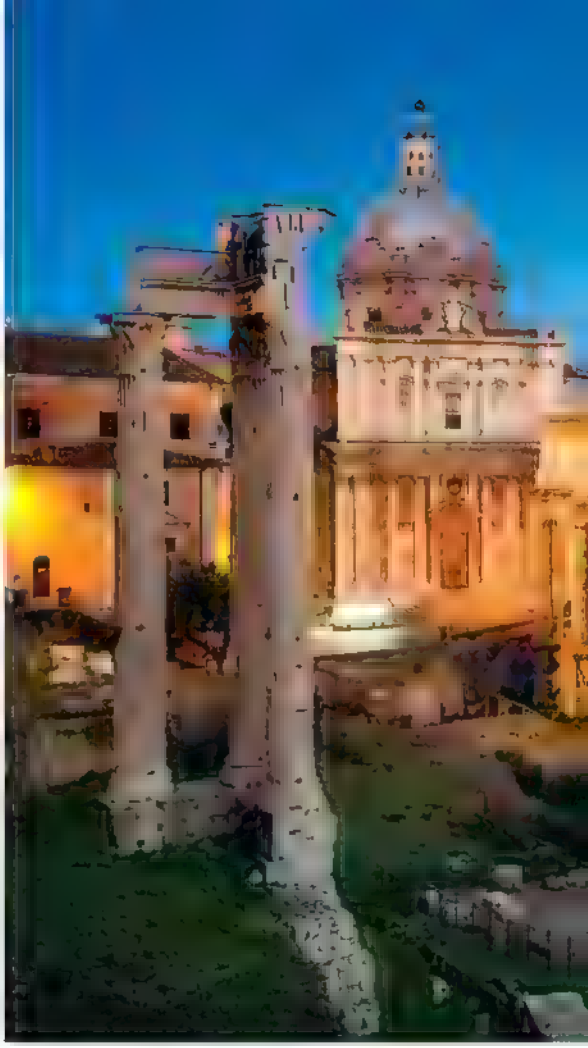
The soldier on the right of this marble diptych from the treasury of Monza Cathedral in northern Italy is traditionally believed to be Stilicho, a general of Vandal origin in the service of Valentinian III's predecessor, Honorius. Some historians, however, suggest it is, in fact, Flavius Aetius, the heroic general of the Catalaunian Plains. The figures on the panel on the left represent the man's wife and son. If the general depicted here really is Aetius, then the busts depicted on the medal of the shield would be the Emperor Valentinian himself—who later kills Aetius with his own hands—and the emperor's mother, Galla Placidia.

FIFTH-CENTURY MARBLE DIPTYCH, CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST, MONZA, ITALY

BRIDGEMAN

SPANISH PAINTER ULPIANO CHECA'S 1887 WORK REPRESENTS THE RAMPAGING HUNS ON HORSEBACK AS AN OVERWHELMING FORCE.

PRISMA ARCHIVO



## STAMP OF AUTHORITY

This gold coin (below), depicts the emperor Valentinian III stomping on a serpent with a human head. Many Roman citizens would have interpreted the snake—a representation of the enemy of the empire—as Attila.

DEA/ALBUM

however, had not taken into account the skillful diplomacy of the Roman general Flavius Aetius, who was able to draw all the diverse peoples of Gaul—Visigoths, Franks, Burgundians, and Alans—into a strong coalition to face down the Hun threat.

A brilliant soldier and statesman, Aetius effectively directed Emperor Valentinian's reign after becoming supreme commander of the Western Roman Empire in 432. Aetius had spent time as a hostage of the Huns, which gave him an insider's knowledge of their culture. His experience in captivity had led him to establish valuable personal relationships with key Hun leaders. Aetius's own rise to power was due to his shrewd employment of Hun mercenaries in the service of the empire. With their help, he had launched a series of military campaigns aimed at keeping the majority of barbarians settled in Gaul under control.

Despite the abilities of its military leader, nothing better illustrates how much power the Western Roman Empire had lost than the need to cobble together such an alliance at all.

Estimates suggest that just 50 years before, the number of Roman soldiers in Gaul exceeded 50,000, but 50 years of civil skirmishes and neglect had depleted its ranks. By 451 there were probably only a few thousand Roman soldiers left in the province.

### Showdown on the Plains

The Huns wreaked their usual devastation on Gaul, but the solid opposition they met increasingly frustrated Attila's aim of a "smash and grab" raid on the province. The unexpected appearance of Aetius and his allies obliged Attila to lift his siege of Aurelianum (modern-day Orleans) and withdraw. After a week on the defensive, Attila decided to face down the Roman-led army on the Catalaunian Plains, to the north of the French city today known as Troyes, which he considered a suitable location for deploying his numerous cavalry.

According to the sixth-century historian Jordanes, the fighting began at midday with a clash between pro-Roman Visigoths and Huns. Each side sought to control a section of high ground beside the battlefield. Aetius's army was probably deployed between this ridge and an area of thick forest, and these natural obstacles would have impeded the Huns from using one of the strategies favored by the nomadic peoples: overwhelming their opponents along their flanks using a cavalry attack.

ROME AFTER ROME

## FROM PILLAR TO POST-IMPERIAL

During Attila's boyhood, when Rome was sacked by the Goths in A.D. 410, the official imperial capital was already slipping into irrelevance. A few years before, in 395, the splitting of the Roman Empire into western and eastern halves meant that much of Rome's power had already shifted north to Milan and Ravenna, leaving the Senate—an institution that traced its history to the eighth century B.C.—as little more than a city council. By the time Odoacer proclaimed himself the first barbarian king of Italy in 476, the city's crumbling monuments were a stark reminder of a vanished age. Regional control was now in the hands of Constantinople, to whom Odoacer himself pledged allegiance. For centuries to come, Rome would be fought over by Europe's contending powers. Its former position as capital of the civilized world evolved into the symbolic Eternal City, the uncontested center of the western church until the Reformation.

Now Attila was forced to launch a full frontal assault. On his orders, the Hun cavalry clashed with the pro-Roman Alans in the center of the battlefield. The Visigoths counterattacked, beat back the Huns, and forced Attila to withdraw.

### Winners and Losers

Despite taking away with him the considerable plunder he had accumulated in the course of the campaign, it was Attila's only major battleground defeat. A year later, he invaded northern Italy, sacking the cities of Milan and Aquileia, but was talked out of launching an attack on Rome after some hasty diplomacy by Pope Leo I.

In 453, the fearsome Hun leader died, somewhat anticlimactically, of a brain hemorrhage on his wedding night, and was buried—if the story is to be believed—in his elaborate triple coffin. It is said that, in a posthumous act of cruelty, the slaves who dug his grave were executed.

Deprived of his ruthless, magnetic leadership, his heirs were unable to keep his empire together. The Hun terror dissipated as quickly as it had arrived. Historians have debated its legacy ever since, questioning the extent to which the century of Hun mayhem was instrumental in Rome's eventual collapse.

Many modern historians consider Attila as a colorful detail in a general picture of administrative chaos, in which Roman rule was threatened more by its own follies than any outside enemy. Years of infighting and poor governance had left the imperial army under-resourced. The fate of the hero of Gaul, the shrewd General Aetius, exemplifies such folly—in 454 he was murdered by his master, Valentinian III, in a fit of rage.

Following Valentinian's reign, a series of short-lived, obscure emperors struggled to prevent their venerable state, inherited from Augustus, from imploding. In 476, the last of these abdicated to a Germanic mercenary, Odoacer, and the Western Roman Empire was no more. ■

A SPECIALIST IN ANCIENT HISTORY BORJA PELEGERO HAS WRITTEN A BIOGRAPHY OF GENGHIS KHAN.

*Learn more*

BOOKS
***The End of Empire: Attila the Hun and the Fall of Rome***
Christopher Kelly, W. W. Norton, 2010

**THE ELUSIVE ETERNAL CITY**
Rome, and its epicenter of power, the Forum (above left) was Attila's objective when he invaded Italy in 452. According to tradition, Pope Leo I convinced him to withdraw his troops in return for a hefty payment of tribute.
SYLVAIN SONNET/GETTY IMAGES

*Marriage and Murder in Renaissance Italy*

# LUCREZIA BORGIA

The illegitimate daughter of a pope and his mistress, Lucrezia Borgia was a famous beauty, notorious for the suspicious deaths and political intrigue that swirled around her and her family. But how much of the scandalous reputation was true, and how much was sheer invention?

JOSEP PALAU I ORTA

**RENAISSANCE WOMAN**
The Borgia coat of arms (opposite) conveys the power associated with Lucrezia's family. Bartolomeo Veneto's 1515 refined portrait, believed to be of her, is starkly at odds with her lurid reputation.
PORTRAIT: AKG/ALBUM
SHIELD: SCALA, FLORENCE

# Pawn in the Family Fortunes

**1480**
Lucrezia Borgia is born near Rome, the illegitimate daughter of Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia—the future Pope Alexander VI—and his lover, Vannozza Cattanei

**1493**
The marriage of Lucrezia to Giovanni Sforza, nephew of Ludovico, Duke of Milan, provides the Borgias with a powerful ally in northern Italy.

**1494**
France's Charles VIII allies with the Duke of Milan against the Borgias, who then plot to kill Lucrezia's husband. Three years later, their marriage is annulled

**1498**
After years of being cloistered in a convent, Lucrezia marries Alfonso of Aragon, son of the king of Naples, briefly an ally of the Borgias.

**1500**
Alfonso is attacked Lucrezia cares for him, but one month later he is found strangled, on the orders—it is rumored—of Lucrezia's brother, Cesare

**1501**
A new marriage is arranged between Lucrezia and Alfonso d'Este, heir to the Duke of Ferrara, in whose court Lucrezia will enjoy a degree of autonomy

**1519**
After nearly two decades of life at the center of the refined Ferrara court, Lucrezia Borgia dies at age 39

**A POPE UNDER SIEGE**
When King Charles VIII of France entered Rome, Pope Alexander VI took refuge in the Castel Sant' Angelo (above) Charles's alliance with Lucrezia's husband's family doomed her first marriage.
OTTO WERNER/AGE FOTOSTOCK

On a spring day in 1480, Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia ordered various astrologers to his home in Rome to tell him the future of a newborn child. Named Lucrezia, the baby girl was the daughter of Vannozza Cattanei, a Roman woman noted for her beauty. Nobody believed for one moment, however, that the child's father was Vannozza's husband, as Vannozza had been Borgia's favorite mistress for many years. To the cardinal's delight, the astrologers foretold a remarkable future for his illegitimate daughter. If their exact predictions came true, the world does not know, but Lucrezia did grow up to become one of the most infamous members of the powerful Borgia clan.

Throughout her short life, Lucrezia Borgia was considered beautiful. In her early 20s, a courtier described her as "of middle height and graceful of form; her face is rather long, as is her nose, her hair golden, her eyes of no particular color, her mouth is rather large, the teeth brilliantly white, the bust admirably proportioned. Her whole being exudes gaiety and humor."

Celebrated in a play by the French writer Victor Hugo, a major opera by Donizetti, and the inspiration for many movies, Lucrezia's life has long fascinated storytellers, who have depicted her as a femme fatale—a seductive woman who poisoned those whom she could not manipulate and who attended orgies and had incestuous relations with members of her family. Most of these characterizations have little or no basis in fact, and many historians now see Lucrezia as a victim of her own family's machinations for power. Her life serves as a vivid insight into the torrid world of papal politics at the height of the Italian Renaissance and during the tumultuous years leading up to the Protestant Reformation.

## Growing up Borgia

Ambitious and worldly, the Borgias originated in Spain and were viewed with alarm and envy by native Italian families. Ascending to the papal throne earlier in the century, Pope Calixtus III was a Borgia. During Lucrezia's infancy, her father continued to maneuver politically to promote the family's interests.

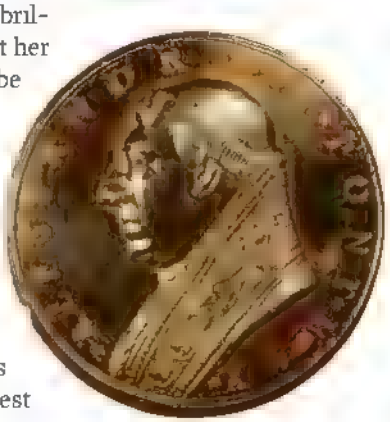
Having spent her early years living with her mother, Lucrezia was later transferred by her father to the house of his cousin, Adriana Orsini, who taught Lucrezia the foundation of high culture: Latin, Greek, Italian, and French, as well as music, singing, and drawing, enabling her to move with ease in the highest court circles. Orsini's approach to education was unequivocal: "Above all be sure you have something to say, and then express yourself with simplicity and frankness, avoiding affected words. I want you to learn how to think, not how to produce brilliant sentences." This education would set her in good stead for a life that was soon to be turned upside down.

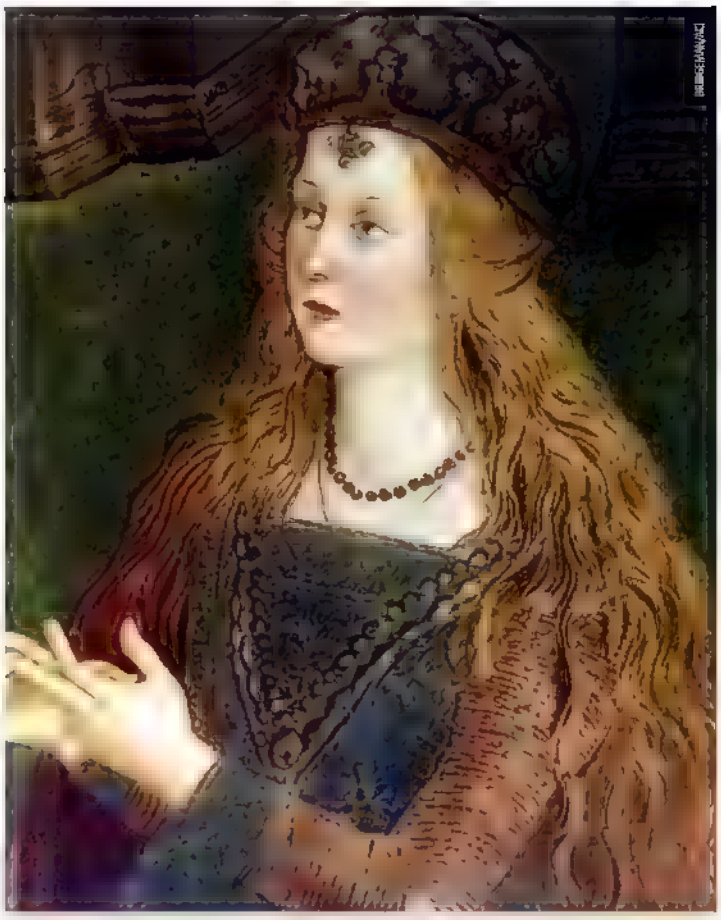
In August 1492, Rome appointed its second Borgia pontiff, when Rodrigo became Pope Alexander VI. Her father's accession changed Lucrezia's life forever. From then on, her fate took on greater importance to the powerful men around her. Because Alexander was pope, his young daughter's marriage prospects soon became the focus of immense interest

**UNHOLY FATHER**

Pope Alexander VI, whose image was struck on the coin below, was fond of his daughter, but this did not stop him from using her for his own political ends. Museo Lázaro Galdiano, Madrid

DRONOZ/ALBUM





A MODEL WOMAN

# LOOKING GOOD

All through her life, Lucrezia's bearing inspired those who met her, most enduringly the painter Bernardino d' Betto—better known as Il Pinturicchio—who used Lucrezia, then 12 years old, as a model for his depiction of Saint Catherine (above, and following pages) in the frescoes he painted for the Borgia Apartments in the Vatican in 1492. In the section "St. Catherine's Disputation," Lucrezia embodies the fourth-century saint, deep in discussion with the Emperor Maximus and 50 pagan philosophers. She stands at the center of the scene, golden hair framing her clear, white complexion, with a bearing both solemn and courtly. The story goes that Saint Catherine defended her arguments with wisdom and eloquence against the pagans who surrounded her. Perhaps Lucrezia drew on the saint's guidance when, in December 1497, when she was 17, she attended the ruling at the Vatican annulling her marriage to Giovanni Sforza. According to an ambassador, Lucrezia made a speech afterward in Latin "with such elegance and gentility that not even Cicero could have spoken with more precision and grace."

in the upper echelons of Roman society. A year later, in 1493, Andrea Boccaccio, the Duke of Ferrara's ambassador to Rome, described the 13-year-old Lucrezia as an exquisite, graceful young thing, whose education had been "full of Christian piety."

The leading families in Italy were all keen to connect their fortunes with those of the powerful Pope Alexander, and many sought to strike an alliance. Cardinal Ascanio Sforza pointed out: "There are many who long to marry into the pope's family via his daughter and he lets many think they have a chance. Even the king of Naples aspires to win her hand!"

No family, however, was better placed to put forward a suitor than that of the man who had played a decisive role in the election of Pope Alexander: Cardinal Sforza himself, whose brother was the powerful Duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza. Cardinal Sforza proposed uniting their house by marrying 13-year-old Lucrezia to his nephew, Giovanni. The offer was accepted by the Borgias, who thereby gained a powerful ally in the north and center of Italy.

On June 9, 1493, Giovanni Sforza made his triumphal entrance into Rome through the Porta del Popolo, and three days later his marriage to Lucrezia took place. The city's elite families, ambassadors, and other officials were invited to attend the ceremony. Accounts describe how the pope and the cardinals ate and danced all night long at the wedding reception. Then in the early hours, the pontiff accompanied the newlyweds to the palace of Santa Maria in Portico. The hopes and fears of Lucrezia, little more than a child herself, were of little consideration to the players involved. The young couple were barely allowed the briefest of domestic interludes before a political storm engulfed them.

Early in 1494, the troops of King Charles VIII of France invaded Italy. Ludovico Sforza, uncle of Lucrezia's husband, forged an alliance with the French against Lucrezia's father. Trapped in Rome, Giovanni was in an impossible position—caught between the loyalties to his uncle on the one side and to his wife and the mighty Borgias on the other. In the end, he refused to turn against his uncle by supporting Lucrezia's brothers, Juan and Cesare. After this decision, Cesare explained to Lucrezia that her husband would have to be killed.

Allegedly warned by Lucrezia of the plan, Giovanni fled to Milan disguised as a beggar. The Borgias then began the long process of trying to annul the marriage on the grounds that Giovanni was impotent and had never consummated the marriage. These whispers marked the beginning of centuries of lurid speculation about Lucrezia's sex life, including rumors—spread by Giovanni himself—that Lucrezia had sexual relations with her own father and brother. Giovanni fought the annulment until Pope Alexander agreed to let him keep Lucrezia's dowry in exchange for ending the marriage. After a public proclamation that her virginity was intact, Lucrezia officially became a single woman again in 1497.

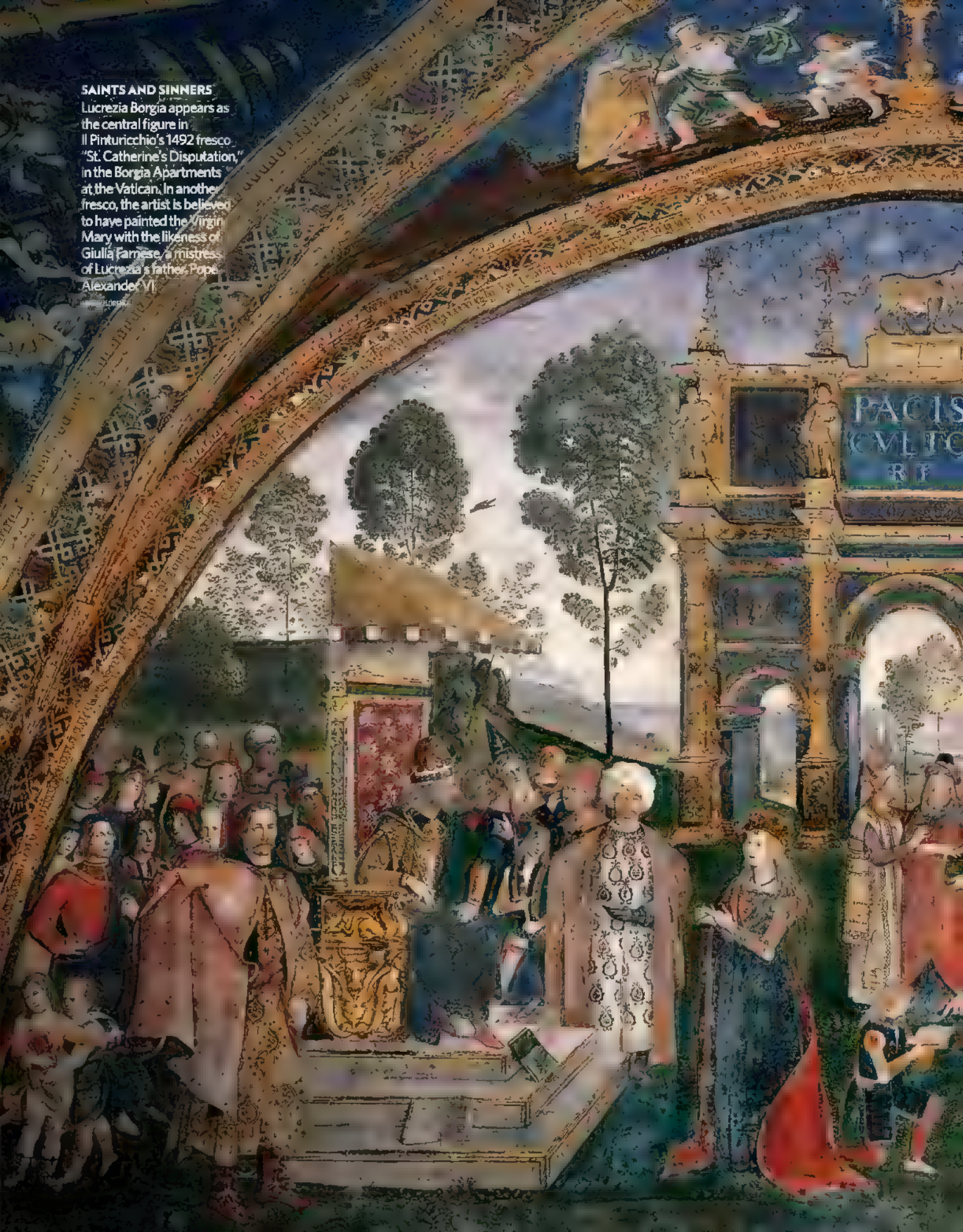
## The Second Time Around

During the annulment negotiations, Lucrezia retired to the convent of San Sisto in Rome. Even the cloister could not shield her from the exploits and misfortunes of her scheming family.

### A HAVEN IN THE NORTH

Dominated by Lucrezia's new home, the Castello Estense, Ferrara had long hosted painters such as Bellini and Piero della Francesca, making the city a cultural hub of the Renaissance.

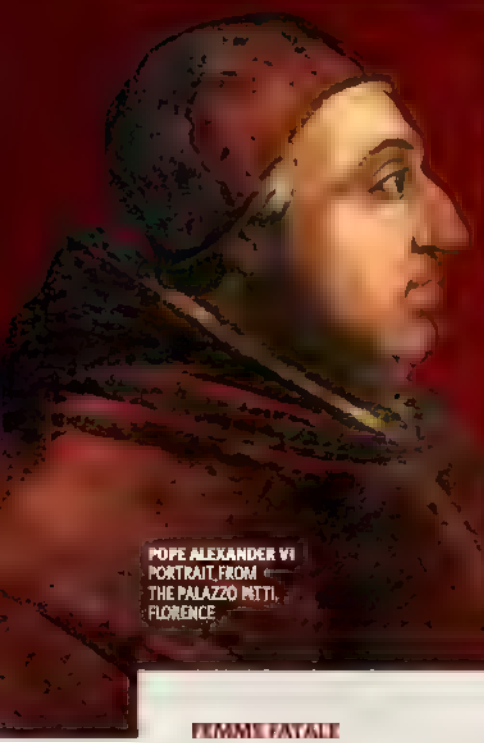
PHOTO DAISSON/GETTY IMAGES



**SAINTS AND SINNERS**
Lucrezia Borgia appears as the central figure in Il Pinturicchio's 1492 fresco "St. Catherine's Disputation," in the Borgia Apartments at the Vatican. In another fresco, the artist is believed to have painted the Virgin Mary with the likeness of Giulia Farnese, a mistress of Lucrezia's father, Pope Alexander VI.

# SEX, LIES, AND THE VATICAN

## Lucrezia Borgia's scandalous reputation persists to this day.



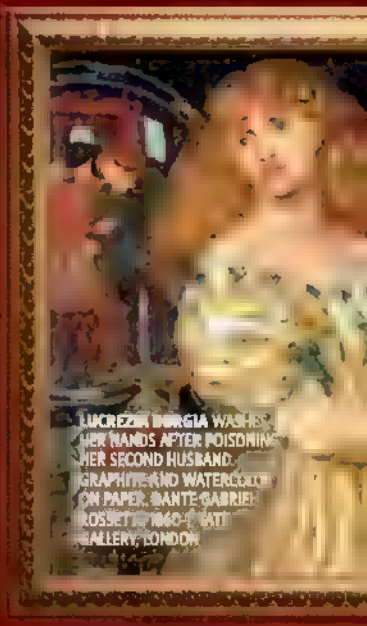
POPE ALEXANDER VI PORTRAIT, FROM THE PALAZZO PITTI, FLORENCE

### WOMAN AMONG CARDINALS

The presence of Lucrezia in the Vatican scandalized the clergy and the many enemies of Pope Alexander VI. One chronicler of the period vented his indignation that Lucrezia and her ladies-in-waiting were allowed into Saint Peter's Basilica. It was said that when the pope went away he left his daughter in charge of official duties. Others went further, claiming that she attended wild parties and even orgies.

### MAN-EATER

Lucrezia's history of relationships with men was indisputably colorful, beginning with the Spanish suitors who bid for her hand when she was barely a teenager. Her three marriages—and the violence and intrigue associated with the first two—stoked the myth of Lucrezia as a lust-crazed murderess. In reality, she was more of a passive pawn in the hands of her ambitious male relatives.



LUCREZIA BORGIA WASHES HER HANDS AFTER POISONING HER SECOND HUSBAND. GRAPHITE AND WATERCOLOR ON PAPER. DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, 1860-1. TATE GALLERY, LONDON

FEMME FATALE

## DEADLY RUMORS

Although the Borgias were no saints, the majority of the lurid tales told about them were invented by their many enemies. Later in her life, at the court of Ferrara, Lucrezia was regarded as the model of good breeding. It was only later that she took a role in the increasingly fantastical set of myths about the Borgias, many centering on her use of poison and other fanciful execution methods to murder her husbands and other rivals. Lucrezia resorted to such brutality, the rumors went, to maintain her crazed grip on power—a ludicrous notion, unsupported by any evidence, but which has proved enduring. Victor Hugo, author of *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, did much to popularize this image with his 1833 play *Lucrezia Borgia*, in which the pope's daughter ponders the various ways she will dispatch her rivals: by hanging, strangling, or poisoning a communion wafer. Based on Hugo's play, Gaetano Donizetti's 1833 opera of the same name also portrayed Lucrezia as a murderer, a libel that spread to 19th-century artistic representations of her, such as the picture (above) by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, depicting Lucrezia having just poisoned her husband.

In 1497, Lucrezia lost her brother Juan, who was found murdered in the Tiber. Meanwhile, her other brother, Cesare—who had been made a cardinal in his late teens by his father—was enjoying a meteoric rise to power, having recently been appointed military chief of the Papal States, the area of central Italy around Rome under direct papal control.

Lucrezia's seclusion at San Sisto ended when the family, as ever pursuing its own interests, started to hunt for a new husband. This time, the suitor was Alfonso of Aragon, the illegitimate son of the king of Naples, the large kingdom that occupied southern Italy. His marriage with Lucrezia would smooth the way to the union of her brother Cesare with Carlotta, daughter of the Neapolitan monarch, who was a key adversary of the pope's principal enemy, France.

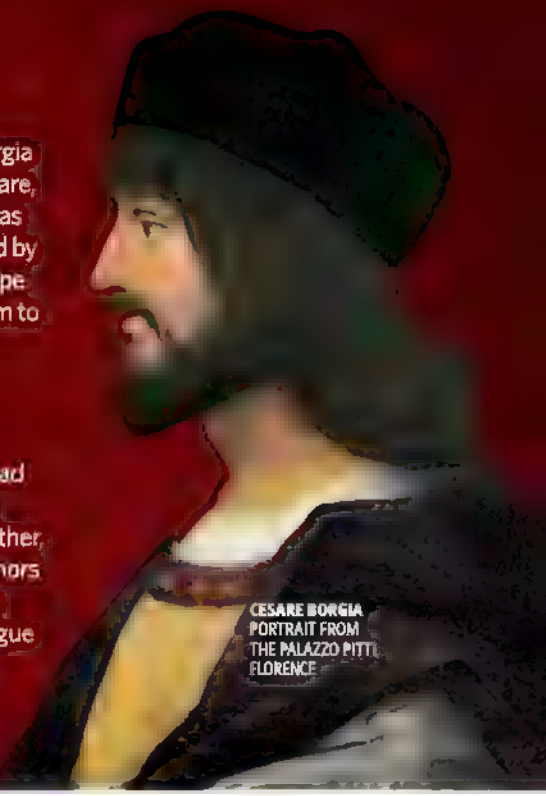
In 1498, Lucrezia married her second husband in the Vatican. This time, the wedding seemed to have been genuinely desired by both the bride and groom. Lucrezia was 18, and her slightly younger consort Alfonso was considered both handsome and well educated. The union

## AN INCESTUOUS UNION

The most serious allegation leveled at Lucrezia Borgia was that of having committed incest with her brother Cesare, and with her father, Pope Alexander VI. This accusation was undoubtedly nothing more than a malicious lie, elaborated by her first husband Giovanni Sforza, who argued that the pope had annulled his marriage to Lucrezia "to have the freedom to enjoy himself with his own daughter."

## A SECRET SON

In 1498 a rumor spread that the pope's daughter had an illegitimate son. Some years later, the pope issued two contradictory papal bulls: the first named Cesare as the father, and the second, himself—a confusion that only fueled rumors of Borgia incest. Some historians believe the child was the issue of Lucrezia's affair with a Spanish servant. Others argue the child was the son of the pope and a Roman woman.



CESARE BORGIA PORTRAIT FROM THE PALAZZO PITTI, FLORENCE

LEFT TO RIGHT: PHOTOAISA; TATE IMAGES; PHOTOAISA

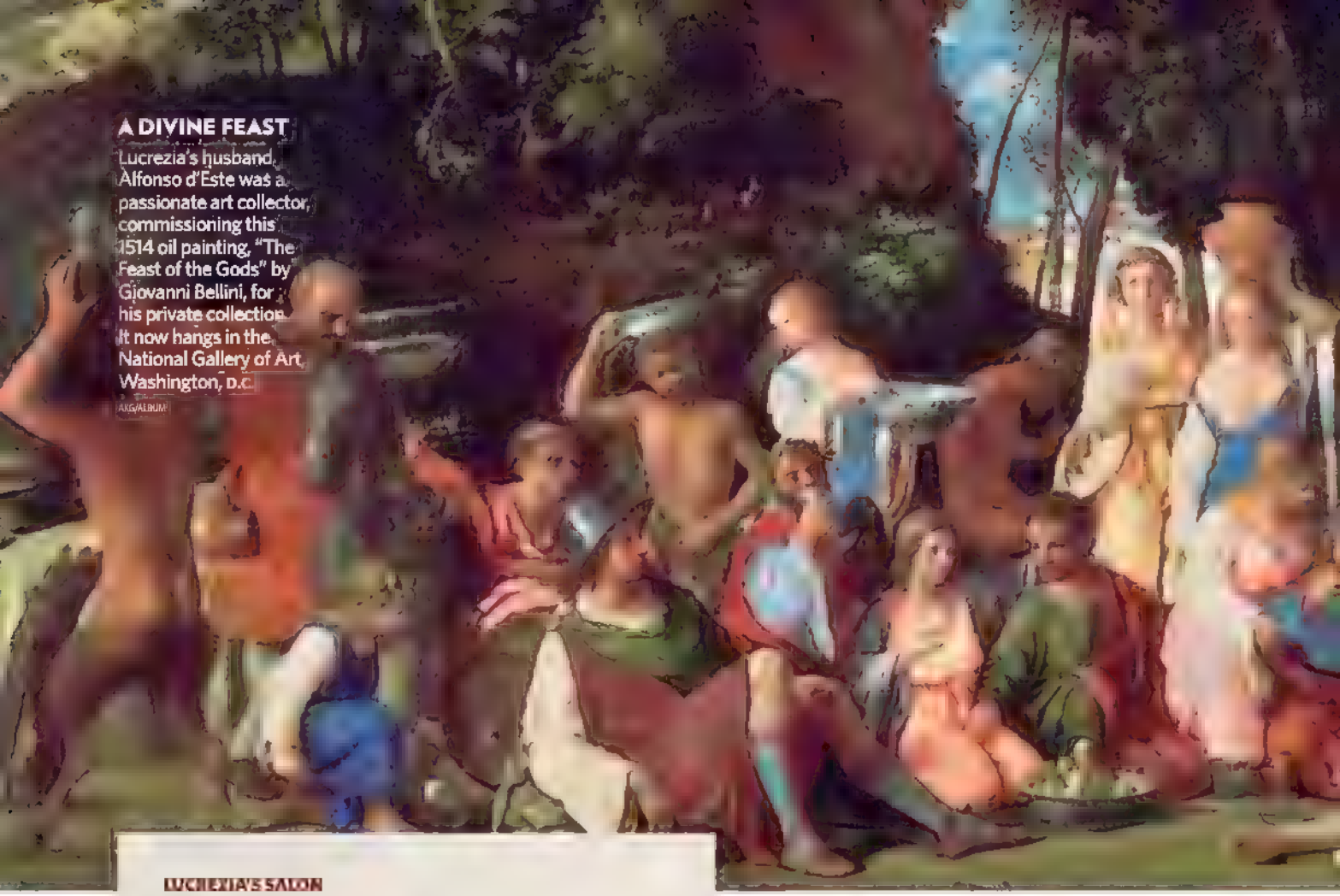
appeared a happy one, and Lucrezia gave birth to a son, named Rodrigo after his grandfather, in 1499. But the conjugal happiness was short-lived. Dynastic maneuverings soon poisoned the young couple's prospects.

The pope's negotiations to wed his son Cesare to Carlotta of Naples fell through. In a startling change of heart, he decided to throw in his lot with his erstwhile enemy, the new king of France, Louis XII. In 1500 Cesare married Charlotte d'Albret, daughter of the Duke of Albret and relative of the French monarch. The interests of the Borgias and those of France had now aligned in direct opposition to those of Naples. This meant that Lucrezia's husband, Alfonso, as a Neapolitan, had become a political liability for the powerful Cesare and Pope Alexander.

In the days running up to the jubilee year of 1500, an astrologer warned Alexander that he should take particular care, as misfortune was destined to befall him. In June of that year, the blow fell. The pope was holding a meeting when a gust of wind knocked down the chimney above him. Three people died, and the pope, seated on the papal throne, was injured. Two weeks later on July 15, while Lucrezia was tending to her wounded father, her young husband and his entourage were attacked by a large group of knife-wielding henchmen on the steps of the Vatican. Seriously wounded, Alfonso was taken to recover in quarters within the Vatican itself.

For the second time in her short life, Lucrezia rallied to the aid of a husband. She decided to nurse him herself, personally taking on the task of preparing his food and giving orders for trusted doctors to be brought from Naples. Still not fully recovered, Pope Alexander ordered a dozen men to stand guard over Alfonso's quarters. But rumors of a plot against him had begun to spread through the streets of Rome. The Florentine ambassador was in no doubt the ambush had been ordered from the highest level: "In this palace there is so much hatred, old and new, so much envy and jealousy . . . that scandal is inevitable."

Sensational rumors spread. Pamphlets produced in Naples recounted how Cesare, while visiting the convalescing Alfonso, whispered in his ear: "What didn't happen at lunch could still



**A DIVINE FEAST**
Lucrezia's husband, Alfonso d'Este was a passionate art collector, commissioning this 1514 oil painting, "The Feast of the Gods" by Giovanni Bellini, for his private collection. It now hangs in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

AKG/ALBUM

LUCREZIA'S SALON

# LA BELLA VITA

The arrival of Lucrezia in Ferrara in 1502 as the new wife of Alfonso d'Este caused a stir. Several observers wrote of the impact she made on them, and eulogized her grace and beauty. The Marquis of Crotone said that "had the bride made her entrance by torchlight she would have outshone them all." The chronicler Bernardino Zambotto was deeply impressed by her "adorable eyes, full of life and joy." He wrote glowingly of her refinement: "She has great tact, is prudent, very intelligent, lively, and most pleasant." Nicolo Cagnolo of Parma wrote that "her whole being radiates good humor and joy beyond words." Lucrezia was surrounded by poets and artists in Ferrara. Of these, the most notable was Ludovico Ariosto, the poet who coined the term "humanism," and whose epic poem, *Orlando Furioso*, is a landmark text of Renaissance humanism. Despite tensions over Lucrezia's intense, but apparently platonic, friendship with the poet Pietro Bembo, the relationship between Lucrezia and her husband seems to have been harmonious. In 1519, when she died, Alfonso is said to have cried bitterly at the loss of his "sweet companion."

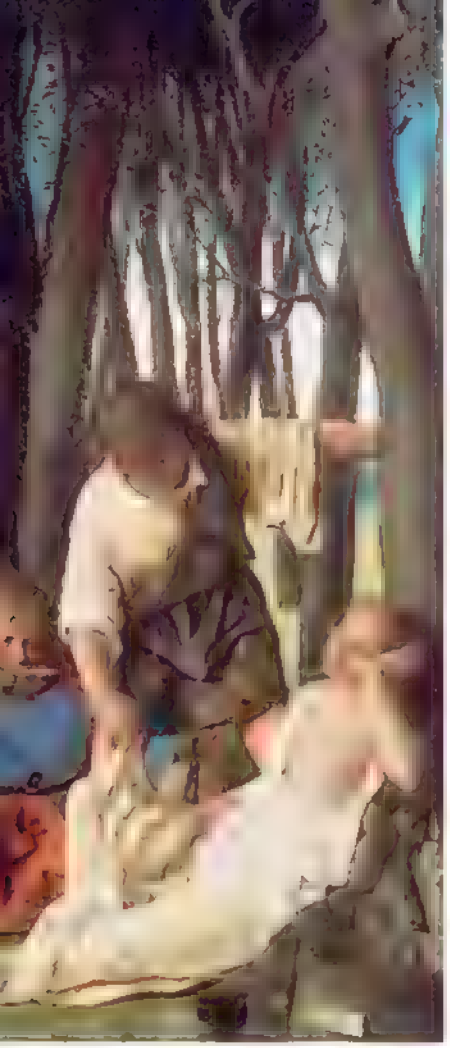
happen at dinner." A month later on August 18, Alfonso was strangled in his bed. By all accounts, Lucrezia was heartbroken.

## Third Time's the Charm

Devastated by the loss of her husband, Lucrezia retired to the city of Nepi, north of Rome. There she went into deep mourning, signing letters to her father and brother as *La Infelicissima*—the Extremely Unhappy One. But the two men had little regard for the 20-year-old widow and were soon in search of a third husband who would again satisfy the family's strategic interests.

Between them, Alexander and Cesare came up with Alfonso d'Este. He seemed the perfect candidate: A 24-year-old widower without children, he was heir to the Duke of Ferrara and offered a very attractive alliance for the Borgias. His family seat was in the strategically vital Romagna in northern Italy, and the family had strong links with France.

In response to news of the impending marriage, the cannons of the Castel Sant' Angelo and all the bells in Rome sounded. Soon after,



the Duke of Ferrara's delegation arrived in Rome and sent back reports to the duke reassuring him about the credentials of his son's Roman bride, whose reputation had become somewhat tainted by the widely publicized exploits of her family. One of the ambassadors reported: "She is a wise lady, and it is not only my opinion, but that of the whole company."

The pair were married in December 1501, and in January 1502, Lucrezia finally left Rome for Ferrara to join her new husband. Her father reminded her that his interests were above her happiness: "You will do more for me from afar, than you could have done remaining here." In a letter to her father two months after leaving, Lucrezia writes: "I consider your Lordship my most precious possession in this world."

Out of reach of her powerful family, Lucrezia was at last able to enjoy some autonomy. Far away from Rome in northern Italy, she brought together some of the most glittering talents of the Renaissance in the court of Ferrara. She seemed to rise above the misfortune into which the rest of the Borgia family were falling.

Pope Alexander VI died a year later, in August 1503. Some sources suggest that he was accidentally poisoned, although the cause is more likely to have been malaria. But whatever caused it, the pope's death drained power from his son Cesare. Pursued by his enemies, he fled to his wife's home in northern Spain, where he died in 1507.

Meanwhile, Lucrezia had established herself in Ferrara. One of the most important texts of the Renaissance testifies to the esteem in which she was held in Ferrara: in *Orlando Furioso*, the poet Ludovico Ariosto affirms that Lucrezia ought to figure in the temple of honor to womanhood for her "beauty and honesty." Even so, after her death on June 24, 1519, following a complicated childbirth, the image of Lucrezia started to come under attack. The many enemies of the Borgias smeared her name with allegations of lust, incest, and murder. No historical basis for these allegations has been found, and yet, in the popular imagination, they continue to distort the image of Lucrezia Borgia to this day.

JOSEP PALAU ORTA IS A HISTORIAN CARRYING OUT RESEARCH AT THE AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA, SPAIN.

**RITES OF PASSAGE**

The 13th-century Cathedral of Ferrara (above), scene of the solemn mass held to mark Lucrezia and Alfonso d'Este's betrothal. In 1505, Alfonso was proclaimed Duke of Ferrara here.

SCALA, FLORENCE

**A NEW PORTRAIT**
As portrayed by Nate Parker in *The Birth of a Nation*, Nat Turner is not driven by madness, but by the common human desire for freedom from slavery.
COURTESY OF FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

# THE BONES OF NAT TURNER

## Reclaiming an American Rebel

Two hundred twelve years after the first West Africans set foot on Virginia soil, Nat Turner, an enslaved preacher, led a slave rebellion in Southampton, Virginia. It was by no means the first revolt or even the most successful, but to many, Nat Turner's rebellion stands out from the others for its brutality and its impact on U.S. history. Recently, Nate Parker's film, *The Birth of a Nation,* revisited this story and inspired the first steps to reclaiming both the bones and the story of Nat Turner and his rebels.

KELLEY FANTO DEETZ

## SELLING SLAVES SOUTH

During Nat Turner's lifetime, the domestic slave trade greatly intensified after the closing of the transatlantic slave trade in 1808, which cut the external supply of enslaved Africans coming to the United States. The economy of the Deep South was booming and needed more laborers to sustain it, so slaveholders who lived farther north provided the workforce. Virginia plantation owners could make money by selling their slaves to the sugar and cotton plantations of the Deep South. This "second middle passage" not only destroyed families but also served as a psychological scare tactic to keep people in line and break up resistance. Thousands of slaves were sold out of Southampton County during the early 19th century. Living with the knowledge that his family could be taken away at any moment surely shaped Nat Turner's outlook, as well as that of the rebels who fought with him. For many enslaved people—used to living in a brutal world that relied on abuse to control them—the future looked bleak.

### THE BUSINESS OF SELLING

Photographed during the Civil War, this building in Alexandria, Virginia (above), housed a slave auction house during the antebellum period. Alexandria grew to be a large domestic slave market, second only to New Orleans.
ALAMY

In the Colonies, slavery and resistance were restless bedfellows, as evidenced by several large-scale attempts to end the institution. Denmark Vesey's 1822 plot in South Carolina, Gabriel Prosser's 1800 conspiracy in Richmond, Virginia, Toussaint L'Ouverture's successful liberation of Haiti in 1791, the 1739 Stono Rebellion in South Carolina, and the countless revolts that took place on land and sea, shaped the revolutionary spirit of enslaved African people. Freedom was always on the minds of the enslaved, and Nat Turner was no exception.

Nat Turner's rebellion came at a crucial time, more than 20 years after the closing of the transatlantic slave trade in 1808, which heightened debates around both the morality and sustainability of slavery. By 1831, abolitionists were using the accounts of former slaves to illustrate its horrors, while southern planters, struggling to justify the institution, were claiming enslaved people were content.

Turner and his soldiers were planning an undeniable testimony of their own; a full-scale war against an institution and all who controlled it. Turner's rebels numbered up to 70 and killed at least 55 whites over the course of two days in August 1831. The rebellion's impact cannot be understated: It stoked panic all over the slave-

## FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM

**Sept. 9, 1739**

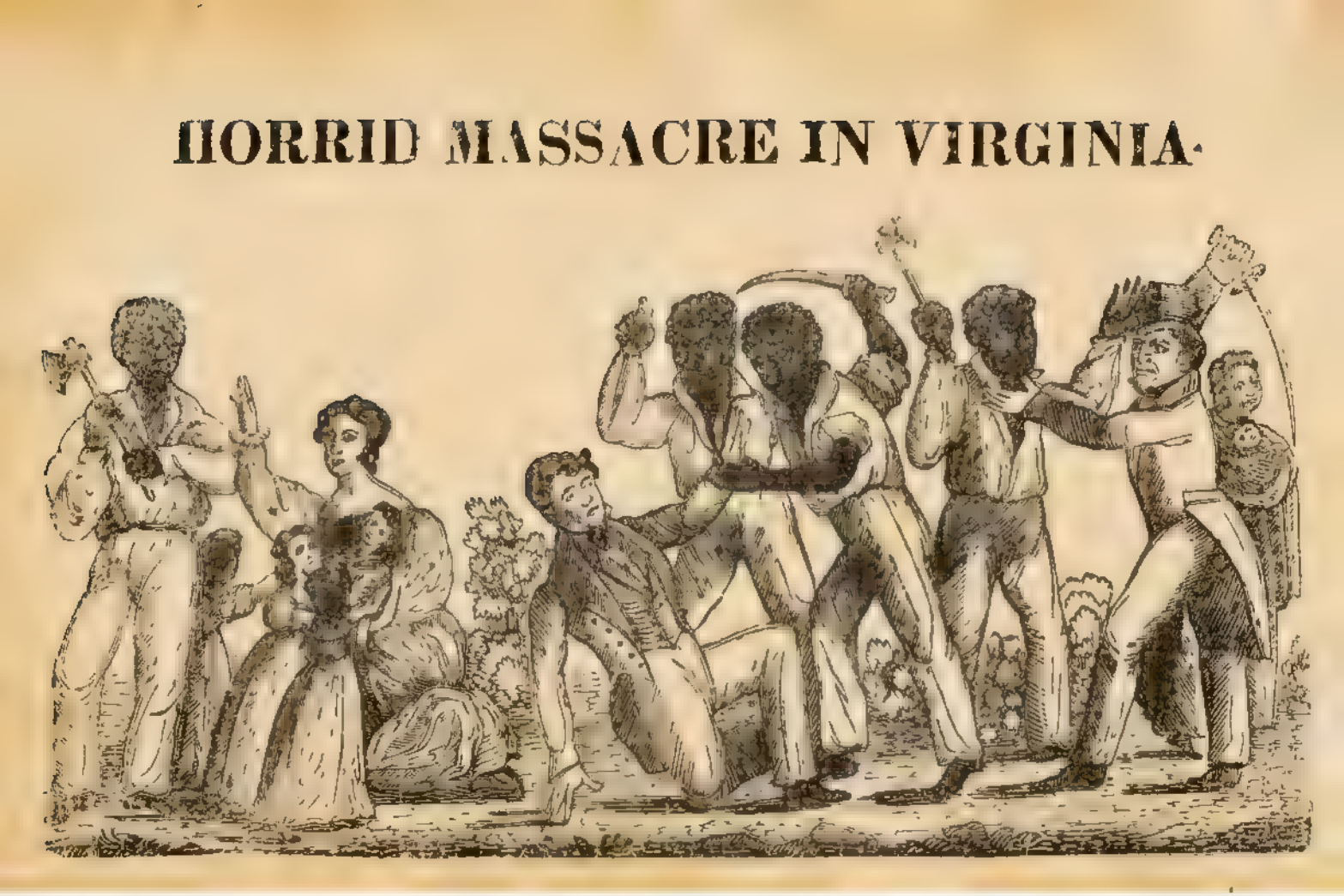
In South Carolina, an enslaved African named Jemmy leads the Stono Rebellion, the largest uprising in the British mainland colonies. This revolt leads to the 1740 Negro Act, which prohibits slaves from growing their own food, congregating, and learning to read

**Aug. 30-31, 1800**

In Henrico County, Virginia, an enslaved blacksmith, Gabriel Prosser, plots to attack Richmond, but his plans are discovered. Of the 72 rebels who face trial, 26, including Gabriel, are found guilty and hanged

**Jan. 8-9, 1811**

In Louisiana, along the east bank of the Mississippi, Charles Deslondes leads the largest slave revolt in U.S. history: nearly 500 people armed with guns, pikes, hoes, and axes. They are defeated, and 95 rebels will be executed.




FOTOSEARCH/GETTY IMAGES

holding South, resulting in the brutal lynchings of hundreds of African Americans, most of whom were not associated with Turner or his cause. It also led to stricter regulations in both the enslaved and free black communities, making their limited freedoms even more precious. Southern slaveholders clung more tightly to the institution, even though its inherent faults and frailties were becoming more obvious.

Turner and his soldiers were eventually caught and executed, their remains scattered or buried in unmarked graves in an attempt to blot out their existence. Although many have tried to silence Nat's story, the rebellion is too compelling to ignore. It is a key moment in the continuous quest for enslaved African Americans to gain the basic human rights denied to them: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Today in Southampton County, several landmarks that existed in Turner's time still dot the landscape, but the place itself looks very different. Modern roads cut through places where slaves once lived, died, and fought for their freedom, creating historical intersections between the past and the present. It is at these crossroads—and others like it—that many American stories sit unearthed, and untold. What do we do with the controversial players in our past?

**DEPICTING THE REVOLT**

Published in an 1831 pamphlet, "Authentic and impartial narrative of the tragical scene which was witnessed in Southampton County," this woodcut detail (above) depicts the rebellion from the white perspective.

## June-July 1822

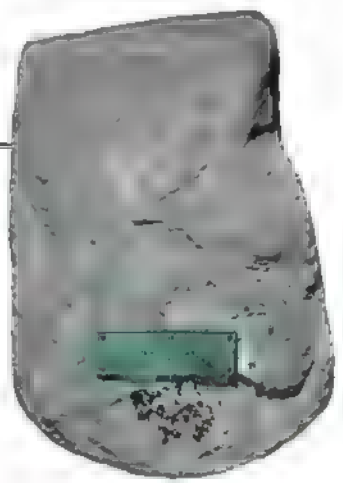
Denmark Vesey, a free black man from Charleston, South Carolina, plans a revolution in which enslaved blacks will kill their masters and escape to Haiti. The plan leaks, and as a result, 35 blacks are hanged at the gallows.

## July 1-Aug. 24, 1839

Mende captives overthrow the crew of the Spanish schooner *La Amistad*. The 53 rebels demand to return to Sierra Leone but are steered to Long Island, New York. They stand trial and are later freed and returned to Africa.

## Nov. 7, 1841

Inspired by the *Amistad*, Madison Washington leads a revolt on the *Creole*, a ship carrying 135 slaves from Richmond to New Orleans. The 18 rebels take the boat to Nassau, ultimately liberating 130 enslaved African Americans.



**SLAVE AUCTION BLOCK** EARLY 19TH CENTURY NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE
COLLECTION OF SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

SLAVE QUARTERS LIKE THESE AT EVERGREEN PLANTATION, LOUISIANA, WERE OFTEN ONE- OR TWO-ROOM WOOD HUTS AND HOUSED FAMILIES.

## LEAVING THE PLANTATION

In order to leave their plantation, enslaved people had to obtain a written pass from their owner or overseer. Sometimes these passes were unavailable, and slaves were told to run errands without the security of a formal pass. Their word was all they had. Slave patrols policed the landscape to monitor their movements, which oftentimes ended in brutality against the enslaved. One account says that Nat fell victim to this violence as a child when he was caught without a pass and beaten severely. Even as a young man he showed courage and leadership, as he organized a revenge scheme against the patrollers who had beaten him just days before. He convinced several young enslaved men to help him set a trap in the woods, along the same road the patrollers frequented. Then they snuck into the woods, tied a rope across the road low to the ground, and waited in the night for the patrollers. Nat baited them, and they chased him on horseback through the woods. Using a white piece of paper to mark where the rope was tied, Nat was able to jump it, while the horses tripped, throwing the patrollers to the ground and breaking one's arm and hurting the shoulder of another.

### LIFE IN CHAINS

Physical restraints, such as these iron leg shackles (below), were used both to inflict punishment and to restrict movement, often when transporting enslaved people who had been sold to their new residences.

TYRONE TURNER/AGE FOTOSTOCK

What stands in Southampton that reminds us of this history? It is here that I hope to uncover more about Turner and his band of rebels in an attempt to reassemble this lost history.

### His Story

Historians know very little about Turner's life before the rebellion. Fictional works, such as William Styron's Pulitzer Prize–winning 1967 novel, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, reimagined Turner and left a wake of controversy surrounding his depiction. More recently, Nate Parker's critically acclaimed film, *The Birth of a Nation*, humanized Turner as a man, a son, a husband, and a father who reaches a breaking point. These works attempt to re-create the 19th century, interface with our collective knowledge of the time, and ignite our historical imaginations. The historical records provide only a skeleton of information, which leaves a blank slate to fill with our own subjective narratives.

Historians face greater narrative challenges than novelists or filmmakers when trying to reconstruct Turner's life and death. Like the vast majority of enslaved people, Turner's life history was not recorded or preserved in letters or journals as were the Founding Fathers'. This absence provides steep challenges for scholars, who have very little traditional evidence to consult. Available records provide basic information from wills and inventories, giving researchers small clues as to the names and worth of individuals. Consulting alternative sources—archaeological evidence, material culture, architecture, and oral histories—is key in discerning the details of slave life. These resources are essential in piecing together the experiences of many African Americans.

In Nat Turner's case, historical records list his name, his owners, and suggest his familial connections. Oral histories can be relied on for general overviews, but they are highly subjective and continuously changing over time. Nat's most infamous entry into American history is woven through historical newspapers and letters

from the era that mention the rebellion. Attorney Thomas Ruffin Gray, a white Southerner, published what he claimed was Nat's confession given to him as he awaited trial. *The Confessions of Nat Turner* is considered by many to be the primary source for information on the rebellion, although Gray's neutrality has rightfully been called into question by historians. Gray was in serious debt, and some believe the book was an attempt to make some quick cash. *The Confessions of Nat Turner* is one of the only sources that reveals both the details of Nat's life and his motivation, as interpreted by Gray.

Despite this scarcity of reliable written sources, there is still much to learn about Turner and his army. It is possible this entire story will never be known, but new evidence is shedding light on his life and even his death.

## His Life

Nat Turner was born on October 2, 1800, to an enslaved woman named Nancy, who was captured from West Africa. His father, presumed to be a slave named Abraham, ran away from the Southampton, Virginia, plantation when Nat was about ten years old, and his fate is unknown. By 1831, Nat Turner and his family had passed through the hands of several different owners. He was born into slavery on the Benjamin Turner plantation and given as a gift, along with his mother and grandmother, to Benjamin's son Samuel around 1809, and formally willed in 1810. By 1822, Samuel had died, and his widow, Elizabeth Turner, oversaw Nat until she married Thomas Moore, who took formal ownership of Nat in 1823. After Elizabeth's death, Moore married Sally Francis, who became a widow and then married Joseph Travis, Nat's last master, although Sally's 10-year-old son, Putnam, was legally Nat's owner.

By 1830, Southampton County was home to 6,573 whites, 1,745 free blacks, and 7,756 enslaved African Americans. This majority black county was a typical Virginia slaveholding community, with plantation owners in Southampton possessing on average a dozen or so slaves. The plantation homes themselves were simple, two-story dwellings

### BADGE OF SLAVERY

Skilled slaves who lived in urban centers, such as Charleston, South Carolina, could be hired out by their owners. Badge laws required them to wear a metal tag (below) with the year, occupation, and city on it.

COLLECTION OF SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

## PROTECTION OF THE ANCESTORS

Nat Turner is known for being a Christian preacher, but he was undoubtedly shaped by the spiritual beliefs of his ancestors. His foremothers came from West Africa and retained much of their rich cultural knowledge. Upon giving birth to Nat, it is rumored that his mother, Nancy, attempted to kill him, a practice not too uncommon among enslaved women who tried to spare their children the brutality of a life in slavery. Many West Africans believed that the line between death and life was fluid, and the choice to kill a person could be a way to save him or her from the physical pain of the living world. It is this same belief that undoubtedly informed and influenced Turner to risk his life and rebel. In West African cosmology, the ancestors protect the living, and as such, would protect him in war. If Nat were to die, then he could help his loved ones who remained in the living world. His Christian faith is unarguable, but his cultural knowledge anchored him in a unique way to the bravery he employed to fight.

with modest furnishings and surrounded by acreage consumed by corn, wheat, cotton, and a little tobacco. These houses were relatively small in scale compared to the mansions on the James River, and by no means resembled the iconic plantation homes seen in popular films. Nonetheless, the slave-owning families were wealthy, including Joseph Travis, Nat's last owner, who lived on 411 acres and had 17 slaves working his property in 1830.

Records show that Nat married an enslaved woman named Cherry who lived on a neighboring plantation, and they had at least one child, a son named Reddick. Nat would have to obtain a pass from his masters to visit his family. If he were caught without one, it would lead to violent punishment or being sold away from his loved ones. Slave patrollers haunted the lands between plantations, waiting to catch a slave walking between properties without a pass. These patrollers were typically lower-class whites, and some abused their power to wrongfully accuse and punish enslaved people.

### A POWERFUL BOOK

This Bible (below) is believed to have been held by Nat Turner when he was captured. Descendants of the revolt's victims donated the Bible to the National Museum of African American History and Culture

COLLECTION OF SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

Maintaining a family under these conditions proved challenging for men and women like Nat and Cherry.

### His Spirituality

According to oral history and the testimony in *Confessions,* Nat's family and community believed he was a blessed child. He had particular markings on his body that his grandmother identified as divine. Anecdotes say he knew about past events that were never told to him, and he experienced several visions that solidified his belief that he was chosen by God to fight.

Nat was largely raised by his foremothers, all of whom were African women, who undoubtedly retained much of their cultural roots. Nat was born at the height of the Second Great Awakening, a religious movement that popularized evangelical Protestantism throughout the states. The dominant rhetoric surrounding this movement masked much of the traditional West African religious practices. Enslaved African people worshipped

in churches, in prayer houses, and in segregated spaces throughout Nat's life. They were forced to convert to Christianity, but many resisted, including the significant number of Muslim slaves who occupied the plantation South. The majority of enslaved folks privately practiced a combination of Christianity and West African religions. But one thing was clear: The white slave-owning South wanted obedience through Christianity. It is in this religious landscape where Nat's story took root.

Nat was deemed a highly intelligent and trustworthy leader. He learned to read, even though literacy among slaves was not widespread, but more common than expected. Many enslaved domestics were taught to read at a basic level in order to maintain a seamlessly functioning household. Those who worked in the fields were less likely to learn, but nonetheless they attempted despite the threat of punishment. Many slaveholders viewed literate slaves as dangerous to the institution of slavery, as literacy could be a doorway to faking passes or reading abolitionist newspapers.

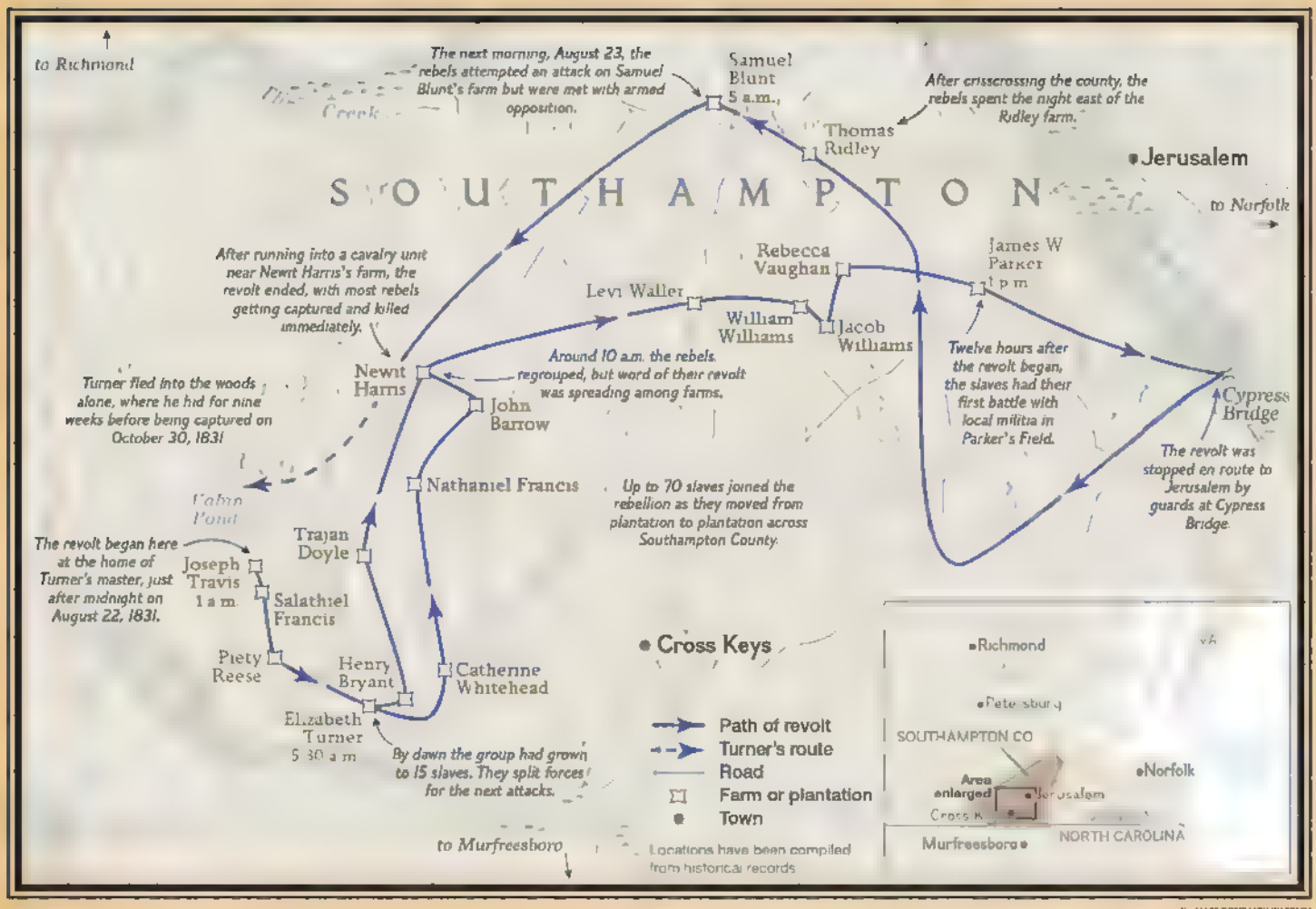
Because Nat could read, he became well versed in the Bible and eventually showed a talent for preaching. Slave owners often relied on the Bible both as justification for, and solace from, their guilt in enslaving fellow human beings. Ignoring portions of the book that focused on liberation of slaves, they often promoted the passages that affirmed slavery; part of the reason literacy was determined to be so dangerous was the possibility of exposure to portions of the Bible that contradicted their narrowly chosen Sunday sermons.

White slaveholders saw Nat's talents as a way to strengthen the message of "Christian" submission by using a black messenger: hiring him out to preach at neighboring plantations. As Nat preached, his perception sharpened, as the abuse he witnessed further rendered slavery an unnecessary evil, and undoubtedly inspired much reflection. Nat was trusted, he was literate, and he was becoming more aware of the hypocritical world he lived in. His faith in God, his visions, and his West African cultural knowledge afforded him a unique confidence in his destiny.

**MEETING PLACE**

Before launching their revolt, the rebels gathered at Cabin Pond (above) to make plans. After the rebellion's failure, these marsh lands of Southampton County served as Nat Turner's hiding place for two months before his capture.

RADCLIFFE ROYE


to Richmond
The next morning, August 23, the rebels attempted an attack on Samuel Blunt's farm but were met with armed opposition.
Samuel Blunt 5 a.m.
After crisscrossing the county, the rebels spent the night east of the Ridley farm.
Thomas Ridley
Jerusalem
SOUTHAMPTON
to Norfolk
After running into a cavalry unit near Newit Harris's farm, the revolt ended, with most rebels getting captured and killed immediately.
Rebecca Vaughan
James W Parker 1 p.m.
Levi Waller
William Williams
Jacob Williams
Around 10 a.m. the rebels regrouped, but word of their revolt was spreading among farms.
Turner fled into the woods alone, where he hid for nine weeks before being captured on October 30, 1831
Newit Harris
John Barrow
Twelve hours after the revolt began, the slaves had their first battle with local militia in Parker's Field.
Cypress Bridge
The revolt was stopped en route to Jerusalem by guards at Cypress Bridge.
Nathaniel Francis
Up to 70 slaves joined the rebellion as they moved from plantation to plantation across Southampton County.
Cabin Pond
The revolt began here at the home of Turner's master, just after midnight on August 22, 1831.
Trajan Doyle
Joseph Travis 1 a.m.
Salathiel Francis
Piety Reese
Henry Bryant
Catherine Whitehead
Elizabeth Turner 5:30 a.m.
By dawn the group had grown to 15 slaves. They split forces for the next attacks.
Cross Keys
Path of revolt
Turner's route
Road
Farm or plantation
Town
Locations have been compiled from historical records
to Murfreesboro
Richmond
Petersburg
SOUTHAMPTON CO.
Norfolk
Area enlarged
Jerusalem
Cross K.
Murfreesboro
NORTH CAROLINA

NG MAPS/ROSEMARY WARDLEY

# THE BLOODY TRAIL FOR FREEDOM

In the evening of August 21, 1831, Nat Turner and his group of rebels met up at Cabin Pond before launching their attack. Their plan was to move eastward toward Jerusalem, the county seat, attacking plantations, gaining recruits from the enslaved, and ultimately capturing the armory. Nat began with six fellow slaves, and their first strike was the farm of Joseph and Sally Travis around 1 a.m. on August 22. There they killed the Travises, Sally's son, Putnam Moore (Nat Turner's legal owner), and Joel Westbrook, an apprentice. From there, Nat led the rebels from farm to farm all through the night and into the next day. They marched east, killing men, women, and children along the way. After two days and nights, the rebels numbered as many as 70 people and their body count at least 55. But their rebellion would be quashed when they were a few short miles from Jerusalem. Virginia's state militia and local whites had rallied to put down the rebellion. Accounts say they first encountered the rebels in Parker's Field but were not able to defeat them. The rebels managed to keep moving toward Jerusalem before being turned back by guards near Cypress Bridge and forced to move west. Their final defeat would come near Newit Harris's farm. Turner himself escaped capture after the loss and managed to hide in the swampy woods of Southampton before being discovered in October.

**THE HANGING TREE** AN ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPH FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA SHOWS WHERE TURNER WAS HANGED.

COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA COLLECTION

## His Fight

After 31 years as a slave, a decade of preaching, and a lifetime of slavery's brutality, Nat Turner made a choice that forever changed the direction of the United States. He spent years planning his revolt, inspired by tales of Prosser, Vesey, and others. Records show that he was outspoken in his beliefs that blacks should be free, and that freedom would be theirs one day; an opinion for which he was whipped in 1828.

In February 1831, Nat witnessed a solar eclipse, which he interpreted as a sign from God to carry out his plan. It is rumored that Nat wanted to revolt on July 4th, likely inspired by his affirmative visions and the events of the American Revolution from just 55 years previous. Patrick Henry's heroism and famous words "Give me liberty or give me death" were spoken by whites every year on the 4th of July, and overheard by the enslaved. Nat's plan to organize an army for the 4th fell short, as sources say he became nervous and abandoned the plot at that time.

By August, however, his plan began to solidify, and in the night hours of August 21, 1831, Hark Moore, Henry Porter, Nelson Edwards, Sam Francis, Will Francis, and Jack Reese met in the woods, roasted a pig, drank brandy, and waited for Nat to arrive. Turner showed up: sober, determined, and courageous. They were to risk all they knew, all that they loved, to fight to end the institution of slavery as they knew it. Turner's story is shared with the rebels who fought by his side, who all gave their life to try to gain freedom. These soldiers have descendants, too, and a legacy to be defined alongside Turner.

Armed with conviction and minimal weapons, they marched to Joseph Travis's house, where Nat Turner's owners lived, and started their war in the depths of the night. By the end of two days, Nat and his group of rebels, which had grown to over 70 people, proceeded throughout the county on their way to Jerusalem, Virginia, and killed approximately 55 whites, including women and children.

PAST AND PRESENT

Bruce Turner, a Nat Turner descendant, stands in front of the restored Rebecca Vaughan House, the last home struck in the 1831 rebellion. The structure was moved from its original location before renovation in the mid-2000s.

RADCLIFFE ROYE

## His Trial

The rebellion was put down, the rebels were captured—many killed without trial—but Nat Turner escaped into the woods and successfully hid for two months. Some say he had help from the neighboring Nottaway Indians, others say his loyal friends and family risked their own safety to bring him food. Nat chose to stay in Southampton, and while patrols were heightened, one must wonder if he was planning a resurgence. But on October 30, Turner was found hiding in the woods and taken to Jerusalem, where he was swiftly sentenced to death by hanging. It was during his short stay in the county jail cell where Thomas Gray took down his confessions.

On Friday, November 11, 1831, Nat Turner was hanged at high noon. The November 14, 1831,

"As it had been said of me in my childhood by ... both white and black ... that I had too much sense to be raised, and if I was, I would never be of any use to any one as a slave."—Nat Turner

AS RECORDED BY THOMAS GRAY IN *THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER*, 1831

*Norfolk Herald* reported that:

> "He betrayed no emotion, but appeared to be utterly reckless in the awful fate that awaited him and even hurried his executioner in the performance of his duty! Precisely at 12 o'clock he was launched into eternity."

In the aftermath of the revolt, Virginia and North Carolina experienced a rash of violence against blacks. White vigilantes took it upon themselves to strike fear into the black communities by murdering dozens of innocent African Americans. The *Richmond Whig* reported:

> "... It is with pain that we speak of another feature of the Southampton Rebellion; for we have been most unwilling to have our sympathies for the sufferers diminished or affected by their misconduct. We allude to the slaughter of many blacks, without trial, and under circumstances of great barbarity..."

**FREEDOM PAPERS**

Free African Americans in the 19th century had to carry documentation with them at all t mes to prove their status. Joseph Trammell, a free man from Virginia, protected h s official papers n th s tin box (below)

COLLECTION OF SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

Terror ran through both black and white communities: Whites feared more rebellions, blacks feared more unjust killings. The rebellion inspired the Virginia Slavery Debate that occurred during the 1831-32 sesson of the House of Delegates, and is considered one of the first significant strides toward the Civil War. Nat Turner's rebellion, one of the most significant events of the 19th century, forced the nation to confront slavery. However, it remains a little-taught story because the rebels' actions are among the most controversial in American history.

Much of the demonization of Turner and his

## SIGNS OF HISTORY

An unassuming street sign (left) stands in Southampton County, whose name, "Blackhead Signpost," is a direct reference to the very place where black people's severed heads were put atop stakes to strike fear into both the free and enslaved black communities. The sign's continued presence bears witness to the violence carried out against black people in the aftermath of Nat Turner's revolt. Today, the name is highly contested and remains a point of debate among Southampton's current residents, most of whom are direct descendants of both victims and participants in the revolt. To some, it is a reminder of the victimization of blacks after the rebellion, something often forgotten. To others, it is an everlasting scar of racial violence literally inscribed on the landscape. While some advocate removing the name altogether, others believe it should stay and a new marker be placed alongside to tell the story of the signpost and what happened there.

RADCLIFFE ROYE

soldiers comes from their murder of women and children. Such drastic measures are cumbersome to digest when revisiting this controversial chapter in America's collective history, as are the 246 years of systematic cruelty toward enslaved men, women, and children. In the eyes of enslaved people, children were not innocent bystanders, but active beneficiaries in the system of slavery: They could own slaves, inherit wealth, possess power, and encompass white supremacist ideologies. Enslaved children and women were not given the freedom or innocence of their white counterparts. This hypocrisy undoubtedly fed into the perceived righteousness of the rebels. Slave-owning children represented the future of the institution, and a never-ending cycle of abuse. Nat's story is one of action spurred on by desperation and determination, one that complicates polarized thinking.

### His Legacy

At different times, and by different people, Turner has been interpreted as a religious fanatic, a cold-blooded killer, a hero, and a freedom fighter. In October 2016, the world was reintroduced to Nat Turner in the film *The Birth of a Nation*, where he reaches his tipping point after witnessing brutality after brutality at the hands of white slaveholders. He breaks free and takes a stand. Because of this film, Nat Turner entered American consciousness again, but this time as a contested hero. This film has also done something unique by causing scores of conversations about Nat's history, which ultimately connected the Turner descendants to National Geographic, all with an interest in further exploration.

As a scholar of slavery in Virginia and a consultant on the film *The Birth of a Nation*, I found myself in search of more concrete answers about Nat's life. As a historical archaeologist, I often read the written records for clues to the answers buried in the earth. My work on the film piqued my own curiosity about Nat, and I found myself in Southampton County on a rainy September day in 2016, standing alongside the Turner family and a film crew from National Geographic.

Local history in Southampton is incredibly rich. Families have lived there, alongside each

### A SHARPENED SWORD

During the rebellion, Nat Turner armed himself with a sword (below) now held by the Southampton Historical Society. Turner was still carrying it when he was captured.

COURTESY OF THE SOUTHAMPTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**X MARKS THE SPOT**
The author stands under an umbrella on the country road above the purported burial site of Nat Turner and his rebels. A preliminary dig in September 2016 revealed the presence of human bones in the soil.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STORIES/BRADEN BARRY

REBECCA HALE AND MARK THIESSEN
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

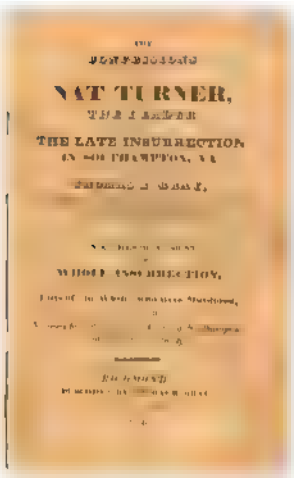
## LAYING THE DEAD TO REST

In October 2016, the alleged skull of Nat Turner (left) was returned to his relatives after years of being held in private collections. The skull, undergoing DNA analysis to verify its identity, has been confirmed as that of an African-American male of the appropriate age. The skull also shows a deformity on the brow line and near the temple area. In life, the man's skin could have shown a differentiation in that spot, a feature matched by descriptions from his grandmother. Nat Turner's adult appearance was not recorded until after he became a fugitive in 1831. Virginia Governor John Floyd described him as: "between 30 & 35 years old, 5 feet 6 or 8 inches high, weighs between 150 and 160 lbs, rather bright complexion, but not a mulatto—broad shouldered—large flat nose—large eyes—broad flat feet—rather knock-kneed—walks brisk and active—hair on the top of the head very thin, no beard except on the upper lip, and the tip of the chin—a scar on one of his temples—also one on the back of his neck—a large knob on one of the bones of his right arm near the wrist produced by a blow." Floyd's account fits the skull's characteristics and gives some weight to the identification as that of Nat Turner.

### JAILHOUSE CONFESSION

In *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (below), Thomas Gray paints Turner as honest, intelligent, and pious, but he attributes Turner's motivation to madness rather than a serious quest for liberty

EVERETT COLLECTION/ALAMY/A



THE CONFESSIONS OF
NAT TURNER,
THE LEADER
OF THE LATE INSURRECTION
IN SOUTHAMPTON, VA
AS FULLY AND VOLUNTARILY MADE
TO THOMAS R. GRAY,
IN THE PRISON WHERE HE WAS CONFINED,
AND SUBMITTED IN PRESENCE OF THE COURT
BY WHICH HE WAS TRIED, CONDEMNED AND EXECUTED
ON FRIDAY THE 11TH OF NOVEMBER, 1831,
FOR THE MURDER OF
MANY WHITE PERSONS,
AT AND IN THE VICINITY OF
JERUSALEM, VIRGINIA,
IN THE MONTH OF AUGUST LAST.

other for generations, which makes for incredible oral history and a complicated legacy. Several people noted that just off the main road lie the unmarked sites of Nat's execution—the "hanging tree"—and of the graves of Nat and his rebels.

### His Bones

No grave marker exists for Nat Turner, nor for his fellow soldiers. The rebels were caught, tried, and executed in different places, and their scattered remains lie under unmarked soil. Nat Turner's burial is somewhat mysterious, both in detail and in location. According to historical accounts, Nat Turner's body was dismembered, his head removed, and his skin used to make keepsakes. Oral history tells of a coin purse and a lampshade made from Turner's skin, as well as a patch of dried skin nailed to a wooden plank that has been circulating in private collections for the past 185 years. Nat Turner's skull is no exception, which, until recently, was held in a private collection in Gary, Indiana. Harvesting out body parts as relics was commonplace for notorious criminals, and is tethered to burial legends associated with Turner's interrment. The rest of his remains, whether whole or dismembered, could lie in a potter's field adjacent to the hanging tree.

In September 2016, I stood near the rumored burial site: a narrow road near a railroad crossing. The plot was heavily covered with vines and brush, and garbage littered the roadside. With help from the James River Institute for Archaeology, National Geographic, the Southampton County clerk Rick Francis (a descendant of both survivors and victims of the Turner rebellion), and the blessings and presence of several Turner descendants, I began the quest to find these rebels, acknowledge their contributions, and eventually repatriate them to a respectful place.

To signify the importance of this moment, we poured libations with Haitian rum directly on the ground of the first test unit of the presumed graveyard. At first, our efforts turned up roadside debris and gravel, but then we started to find some ceramics, typical of those from the 19th century. Digging continued, and within

minutes, shovel hit bone. Excavation halted, and the findings were packed up and sent to the Smithsonian for analysis. After testing, the bones were confirmed to be human, a discovery that takes us closer to the chance to recover these lost Americans and give them a reburial befitting the freedom fighters that they were. Work at the site will continue, and hopefully a fuller story will be told. Standing there, at the crossroads, 2016 touched 1831, and the cracks in the story began to seal.

## In Retrospect

At its heart, Nat Turner's rebellion is a story about fear; fear of a lifetime of slavery versus fear of rebellion. These factors drove this episode in ways unthinkable to the uninvolved, but which invite investigation and judgment from those displaced by location or time. American freedom fighters are deemed heroic: The United States was born out of rebellion, but the notion of liberty has resonated differently depending on who fights for it. Is all liberty treated equal? Was Nat Turner also a freedom fighter? If the past is everything that happened before now, and history is what we choose to remember, what is the history of Nat Turner? What is his legacy? How will it change with the evidence that lies under the crossroads in Southampton?

On October 7, 2016, National Geographic and members of the Turner family again found themselves at an important place: Gary, Indiana. Nat Turner's presumed skull was handed over after 185 years of residing in the hands of personal collectors. In an emotional transaction, Turner's skull was finally in the possession of his family. While extensive DNA testing is underway, the ceremonial gesture is nonetheless a moment of restorative justice. His bones, some scattered beneath the soil, are coming together as a result of a film, a family, and a moment unmatched by any other in our collective pasts. What will come of this is still unknown, but the bones are speaking and giving us answers to an American mystery.

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**REMAINS OF THE REBELS?**

The author holds the bones (above), uncovered in a preliminary excavation of the suspected burial site of Nat Turner and the rebels. Further digs are planned for this plot of land to explore more of its significant history

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STUDIOS/BRADEN BARRY

# The Ghostly Treasure Ship of Sutton Hoo

On the eve of World War II, a colorful history buff opened a series of mounds at Sutton Hoo in England, revealing the imprint of a funerary ship and a huge cache of seventh-century royal treasure. The find reshaped what historians know of the Anglo-Saxon Middle Ages.

In southern England near the Suffolk coast lies a stretch of sandy heathland dotted by mysterious mounds of earth. Inspiring strange tales and superstitions among local people, these barrows charmed newlyweds Frank and Edith Pretty, who purchased the property, known as Sutton Hoo, in 1926.

The couple made their home at Sutton Hoo for nearly nine years until Frank's untimely death in late 1934. Edith continued to live there, and she grew increasingly curious about the barrows on her property. A lifelong fascination with the occult had led her, like many wealthy women of her time, to consult spiritualists in London. Some say that after her husband's death, her interest in spiritualism grew and even expanded

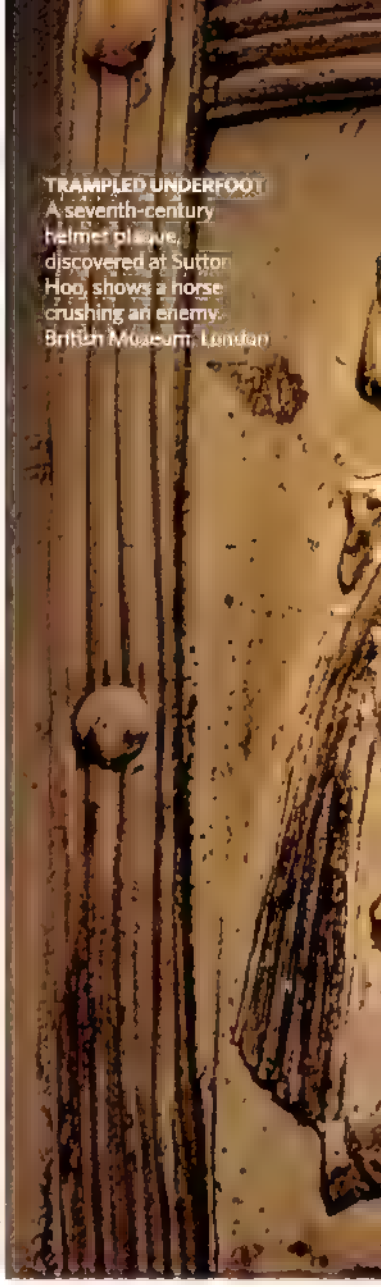
to include the barrows on her property. Disputed accounts even describe Edith as having a vision of a ghostly procession passing through the mounds near her house. Whatever the true cause, she decided in 1937 to have the land excavated and approached a museum in nearby Ipswich to discuss it.

### What Lies Beneath

Self-taught archaeologist Basil Brown worked as an excavation assistant at the museum and took on Edith's project. His decision to take the job not only would change his life but also radically alter, and deepen, the understanding scholars had of the early Anglo-Saxon period in England following the collapse of Roman rule.

At first, Brown assumed that any artifacts that had once lain in the mounds would have been looted many years before. His first dig, in the summer of 1938, confirmed his initial skepticism: tumuli two, three, and four contained only a few objects and evidence of human remains.

In 1939 Brown resumed the dig and turned his attention to the largest barrow, known as tumulus one. During the excavation, he came across a section of hard earth stained with rust and containing nails at regular intervals. Progressing with painstaking care, Brown realized that he had found the imprint of a ship, more than 80 feet in length. Although the wood had long since decayed, its ghostly outline and rich cargo of grave goods remained intact.



**TRAMPLED UNDERFOOT** A seventh-century helmet plaque, discovered at Sutton Hoo, shows a horse crushing an enemy. British Museum, London

BRIDGEMAN/AC

**SILVER BOWL** FROM SUTTON HOO. SEVENTH CENTURY. BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON

ULLSTEIN BILD/CORDON PRESS

**1926**
**Edith Pretty** buys the site of Sutton Hoo, and becomes fascinated by the strange mounds of earth on her land.

**1939**
**Basil Brown** discovers a funerary cache of 263 objects in tumulus 1. World War II breaks out in September.

**1946**
**After being kept safe** underground during the war, the treasure—owned by the British Museum—is put on public display.

**1990s**
**Further excavations** uncover another intact burial site in tumulus 17 containing a young man, a horse, and weapons.

How had it stayed undisturbed for so long? Luck, as it turns out. Together with Charles Phillips from the University of Cambridge, who had also joined the dig, they found evidence that grave robbers had indeed probed the site in the past. Fortunately, the thieves dug in the wrong place, narrowly missing the treasure.

The collection of 263 objects included weapons, silver cutlery, gold buckles, coins, and a distinctive full-face helmet, of a kind never before recovered in Britain. Examining the artifacts, they concluded that the settlement was not Viking, as first assumed, but Anglo-Saxon.

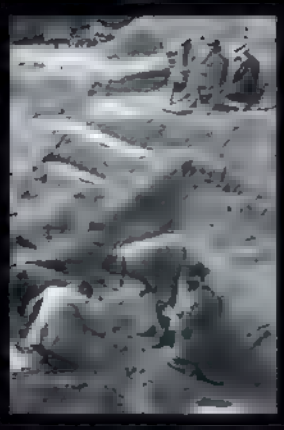
**Pride of England**

The significance of Sutton Hoo was instantly recognized. The largest Anglo-Saxon ship burial ever discovered contained artifacts of a quality and quantity never seen before, and this fresh evidence of

*(continued on page 94)*

## THE LANDLADY

**BORN EDITH DEMPSTER** in 1883, Edith Pretty lived a colorful life before settling down at Sutton Hoo. Growing up, she vacationed in Egypt and India. She served with the Red Cross in World War I. Having initiated the dig on her land in 1938, she took a close interest in the discoveries, and is shown here, seated between two friends, observing the uncovering of the ship burial.



BRITISH MUSEUM/SCALA, FLORENCE

## VOYAGE INTO THE AFTERLIFE

**FULLY EQUIPPED** for the hereafter, the 80-foot-long boat, whose imprint (above) was uncovered in the summer of 1939, is the richest ship burial ever found in northern Europe. Mindful of the grave robbers who had plundered the mounds over the centuries, the archaeologists worked around the clock, under police guard. Since then, several of the other 18 tumuli at Sutton Hoo have yielded further discoveries. In the 1990s, a warrior noble in full armor was found buried alongside his horse. Since one-third of the Sutton Hoo site has still not been investigated, historians hope its tumuli will shed yet more light on the twilight years of pagan England.

ULLSTEIN BILD/CORDON PRESS

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## Careful Arrangements

**THE ARTIFACTS DISCOVERED** in the ground at Sutton Hoo had been laid out in a specific order. On one side were objects for everyday use, such as cooking pots and buckets. On the opposite side were the weapons of the deceased, among them a circular shield. In the center of the chamber were objects for personal use.

Iron and bronze helmet
Of Scandinavian design, its crest takes the form of a dragon. It includes eyebrows, a nose protector, and even a moustache.
Shoulder clasps
Among numerous objects for personal use were these shoulder clasps made of gold, garnet, and glass cloisonné.
Gold belt buckle
The hole in the center perhaps held an amulet or relic. The interlaced design depicts serpents intertwined with a fabulous animal.
Bronze pot
This was perhaps used for hand washing after a feast. It has hooks for hanging it up, and is decorated with glass and enamel.

HELMET: AKG/ALBUM. SHOULDER CLASPS: PRISMA ARCHIVO. BELT BUCKLE: ERICH LESSING/ALBUM. POT: ERICH LESSING/ALBUM

England's early warrior society became charged with symbolism when Britain declared war on Nazi Germany later that year. In keeping with the patriotic, wartime spirit, Edith Pretty donated the find to the British Museum in London. To keep the artifacts safe during World War II, they were stored underground in the tunnels of London's rail system.

In the decades since, Sutton Hoo has been studied in depth. Its treasures, which include objects from the Byzantine Empire and the Mideast, have deepened researchers' understanding of the trade networks between the Anglo-Saxons and the European mainland.

### An Epic Farewell

For many scholars, one of the most exciting aspects of the Sutton Hoo burial is its similarity to that depicted in the Old English epic poem, *Beowulf*. The eponymous hero of this work is a Geat from modern-day Sweden, who comes to the aid of the Danish king. In the poem, composed in the eighth century, there is a description of the burial of one Scyld Scefing, an ancestor of the Danish royal family.

According to the poem, Scyld is laid to rest in a boat, surrounded by treasures. Although there is almost certainly no direct link between the events described in *Beowulf* and the burial, the same world of traditions and ideas inspired them. In both cases there is a notion that death includes a journey to the hereafter and that the deceased must be interred with objects from the world of the living, such as weapons, money, drinking horns, and musical instruments. The burial at Sutton Hoo, like those of confirmed Viking burials, shows a well-developed notion of the afterlife.

Who then was buried in the boat at Sutton Hoo? No body has yet been found—perhaps because the acidic soil long ago dissolved it, although scholars point out that human remains have been found elsewhere at the site. One mainstream theory is that the burial belonged to Rædwald, King of East Anglia, who died in 624, and whose reign coincides with the dates of the Sutton Hoo treasure.

Rædwald was one of the first Angle kings to convert to Christianity, and although the ship contains pagan elements, academics do not see this as a reason to rule him out. He lived at a time in which ancient customs coexisted with new religious ideas, a fascinating period in which northern Europe's pagan tradition was beginning to give way to the new world of Christianity.

*—Verónica Walker*

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# Next Issue

LES FRÈRES CHUZEVILLE/RMN-GRAND PALAIS

## MILLENNIA OF EGYPTIAN MUMMIES

**MUMMIFICATION** is one of the oldest traditions from ancient Egypt, dating to around 2600 B.C. The practice continued for more than 2,000 years and reflected the consistent Egyptian belief that a well-preserved body would house the soul in an "eternal dwelling" after death. The ritual was an expression of deeply held faith and even great beauty as exemplified by the intricate bandaging of this mummy (left) from the Ptolemaic dynasty, displayed at the Louvre, Paris.

## THE ELGIN MARBLES: SAVED OR STOLEN?

**THE PARTHENON,** completed in 432 B.C., is one of Greece's most iconic buildings. For centuries, looters pillaged its treasures. In the early 1800s, Lord Elgin, a British noble, had the remaining marble statues, including the relief (below), removed and taken to Britain to protect them. Today, Greece demands the marbles' return, but the British Museum refuses, an important conflict with implications for objects held in museum collections around the world.

SCALA, FLORENCE

## The Real Joan of Arc

In the chaos of the Hundred Years' War, a hero emerged to lead the French to a victory. Joan of Arc, later executed as a heretic and then canonized, left behind a fascinating legacy.

## America Joins the Great War

After World War I erupted in 1914, United States president Woodrow Wilson tried to stay neutral. But in April 1917, one hundred years ago, America officially entered the fray.

## The Apocryphal Gospels

The New Testament of the Bible contains 27 canonical books, but more works—the apocrypha—did not make the cut and were suppressed by the early Christian Church.

## Crossing the Rubicon

"The die is cast." With these fateful words, in 49 B.C. Julius Caesar crossed the river into Italy, an act of war that launched his unstoppable rise and spelled doom for the Roman Republic.

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# TIMELESS TALES

## of Adventure, Magic, Love, and Betrayal

**From Ali Baba and Aladdin to Sinbad the Sailor and Scheherazade, the magical storytelling in these 25 classic tales from the Arabian Nights ignites readers' imaginations and inspires them to read, dream, think, and share.**

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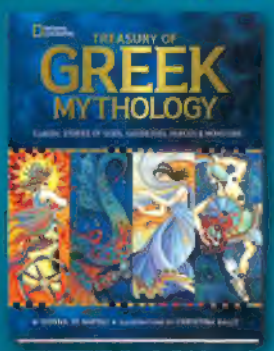


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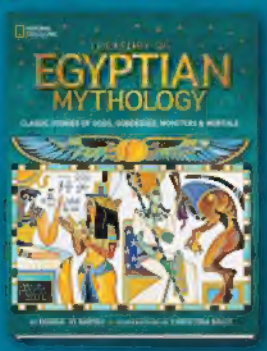


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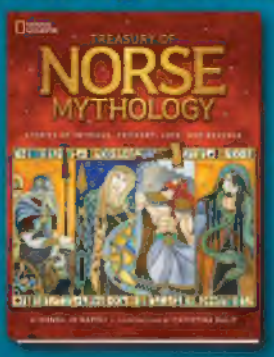


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